



# Comprehensive Plan 2012



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## INTRODUCTION

This document seeks to provide a policy basis for building on the distinctive qualities that make the Town of Varnville and the Lowcountry Region a very livable place. The Comprehensive Plan is sometimes referred to as a blueprint for future development and redevelopment. In the end the policies, goals and objectives in the following pages will be implemented through law in the new Zoning Ordinance and action through capital improvement projects and investment by private businesses.

The Plan will give residents, decision-makers, and developers the tools to implement the community's vision. It provides historical insight, a snapshot of existing conditions, and foresight into how transportation, housing, businesses, key institutions, and places of recreation will interact with each other in the years to come. This plan is flexible enough to incorporate a set of diverse concepts and durable enough to work positively under unclear economic circumstances.

The Comprehensive Plan will be used during the decision-making process to guide leaders during zoning requests, the expansion of major infrastructure improvements or deciding the location of new infrastructure. It will help determine the best approach in the case of annexation of additional territory.

The South Carolina Planning Enabling Act of 1994 requires that a community update their comprehensive plan every five years and conduct a major overhaul of the Plan every ten years. This document is an entirely new Plan for Varnville, with all nine required Comprehensive Plan elements included. Varnville embarked on the comprehensive planning process as new data became available from the U.S. Census Bureau. This allows the Plan to be up-to-date in terms of analysis. When the Town updates the Plan in 2017 it will have the benefit of new data from the Census's American Communities Survey and when Varnville rewrites this Plan in ten years, the process will also coincide with the latest Census data.

## OVERVIEW OF CHANGES IN THE TOWN OF VARNVILLE

Since the last Comprehensive Plan was adopted on December 21, 1999, some key factors have changed in Varnville, the Lowcountry Region, and the nation.

- Census figures show that Varnville's Population grew modestly at 4.07 percent between 2000 and 2010. During the same period the entire county's population declined by 296 persons, with the Town of Estill losing 385 residents and the Town of Hampton 29. Varnville's population is expected to continue to grow throughout the next 20 years.
- During the latest economic downturn, Varnville experienced fewer and fewer dramatic negative effects from the housing crisis than that of other jurisdictions within the Region and the nation as a whole. This will allow the town to be poised for growth as the economy improves.
- The implementation of Regional initiatives, such as the Lowcountry Economic Diversification Strategy, will impact Varnville as the town will be seen as a desirable place to do business and provide for workforce housing for area industry.
- The widening of S.C. Highway 68 to the industrial park may also have an influence on the economy in Varnville, and in turn the land use patterns within the town as employees will call Varnville home and support and spin-off businesses find quality buildings, land and workers in the Town of Varnville.
- The recent addition of national chain retail establishments along the U.S. 278 Corridor in Varnville indicates that there is a market demand for the sale of products and services.
- The desire for a town planning program and the need for a new Zoning Ordinance has arisen in Varnville. Trends and needs have changed in the years since initial the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance were implemented. The planning program will ensure that future growth will be compatible with the needs and vision of the community as a whole.
- Hampton County recently completed an entirely new Comprehensive Plan and is currently rewriting the Zoning Ordinance. The Town of Varnville's Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance will compliment that of the County.

## GENERAL PLANNING GOALS FOR THE TOWN OF VARNVILLE

The town of Varnville is fortunate to have some of the basic essentials that help advance the quality of life for residents and make the town a great place to visit. Some of these features consist of: abundant natural resources; unique retail businesses; historic buildings, homes and churches; walkable neighborhoods based on a grid-pattern with tree lined streets; and community facilities and services within close proximity to where people live. To ensure that the anticipated growth, both inside and outside the current municipal boundaries, occurs in a manner which is as favorable for the current residents as it is to the future prosperity of the Town, the following should be achieved.

- **Land use** and development patterns should extend the present grid-pattern and building scale, with an emphasis on connectivity between existing and new development by means of pedestrian and bicycle systems, as well as roads. Mixed use developments with pedestrian oriented retail and commercial uses will also be encourage to achieve this goal. Careful infrastructure planning and capital budgeting should balance the Town's long range vision with the rights of landowners. New growth should pay for itself with creating undue financial burdens on the Town's existing population.
- **Natural and historic resources** will be protected. Development will be balanced with the conservation and enhancement of wetlands and forested areas. Natural resources will provide for scenic landscapes to attract visitors and high-quality development. Cultural resources will be preserved for businesses and homes as well as a driver for economic development and tourism.
- The Town of Varnville's **economy** will become more competitive by attracting a diverse set of businesses, in the retail, tourism, and light industry sectors. These businesses will provide employment opportunities for residents and an increased tax base to accommodate the Town's growth.
- The will Town include a wide-ranging mix of **housing** types and prices to meet the needs of present and future residents. Affordable housing can be achieved through efficient use of infrastructure along with a variety of incentives for developers. Affordable housing should be attractive and fit into the context of historic Varnville and the existing neighborhoods.



# Chapter 1: Cultural Resources

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The importance of the presence and preservation of historic resources in the Town of Varnville is three-fold:

- ☞ To teach present and future residents of Varnville about its multi-faceted history;
- ☞ To contribute to the special character and quality of life of Varnville;
- ☞ To serve as the basis for the development of a heritage tourism industry.

## 1.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Through the years Varnville has shown a firm resilience that has endured war, economic depression, fire, and disease. Despite adversity, Varnville has sustained its people with a strong quality of life. Today Varnville is defined by its quiet character. Mature live oaks majestically bend and curl throughout—folding into the fabric of the community--creating a robust sense of place. Bursts of color from the crape myrtles, oleander, and potted flowers polish the Town’s charm. American flags adorn the front stoop of homes and business to show pride in country and town. Children walk to school here. The resonance of a parent’s voice can be heard from the porch, as they call their children in at night. Certain, but not all qualities are rooted in the customs and traditions of days gone by.



Native Americans subsisted on the bounty of the Region’s natural resources for some time before European settlement. Some tribes included the Yemassee, Cherokee, Huspah, and approximately 24 others. Later, Europeans settlers sought land in the area for farming around the fertile river valleys.



The Varnville area first showed up on maps in the Beaufort District, which was formed from the parishes of Prince William, St. Luke, St. Helena, and St. Peter in 1769. In 1878, Hampton County was shaped from part of the district.

The Town of Varnville’s establishment originates with the development of the railroad. Railroad investors were interested in the access to the deep water at Port Royal. In 1873 the railroad forged a 112 mile path

that crossed the coastal plain from Augusta to Port Royal, passing through a stop reported as Dixie Switch on early maps—later known as Varnville.

Local entrepreneurs, the Varn brothers, sold part of the right of way for the railway in 1872. They then plotted out a town on the north side of the tracks where they operated a saw mill. The settlement quickly proceeded with a post office which opened in 1872. Area farmers began to move to the settlement. By 1878 residents petitioned the state legislature for the incorporation. In 1880 Varnville was officially a town chartered by the State of South Carolina.

Varnville became a center for agriculture and the lumber industry. Area agriculture included the raising of vegetables and the cultivation of cotton and tobacco. Hogs and cattle were raised as well. At one point, sweet potatoes were a significant commodity in Varnville—so important the town had a curing house.

Varnville once was home to one of the largest lumber mills in the South. It processed cypress, cedar, poplar, and long leaf pine—some of the area's most plentiful natural resources. The Big Salkehatchie Cypress Lumber Company opened in 1915 and would provide a base for the local economy that stimulated an active lifestyle within the community as up to 400 people found work in the mill. Recreational activities like dancing and swimming became popular in this era. The zenith wouldn't last as the Great Depression loomed and the business closed in 1933.

Residents were offered much in terms of entertainment through the years, in fact neighboring communities were drawn to the Town. The Pavilion, used for dances, would entice Marines from Paris Island during World War II – a start to many romances. Baseball, a favorite pastime in Varnville, pleased many local residents with competitive teams. Two theatres were built, the VACO Theater, also known as the Varnville Amusement Company, which was destroyed by fire, and the Strand Theater built to replace it. The Strand Theater didn't spare details with marble floors and ornate moldings. At the time, the movies were silent, but live music was provided by a pianist. The theater succumbed to deterioration and was razed.

Varnville's economy had been largely based on the lumber industry from the beginning. However, in the 1940s a plywood plastic manufacturer located in Hampton. At its peak over 1000 people were employed. This allowed for the diversification of the local economy. Area residents were no longer limited to work on the farm and sawmill.

Varnville's business district has had a vibrant past as it bustled with various establishments throughout its history. Meat lockers, grocery stores, movie theaters, barber shops, banks, furniture stores, men and women's clothing, and hardware stores all enhanced the business district. Tragically, many businesses faced disaster through the years when fire broke out on a number of occasions destroying part, if not all of downtown in 1894, 1914 and 1917.



Through the years Varnville's leaders were aggressively adding new services for residents, even in tough times. Reports indicate that Varnville lead the way with modern roads. In the 1930s Water lines were added to allow for development further from the Town's core.

In the 1990s concerned residents formed the Varnville Community Council, a civic organization, which focused on esthetic issues facing the town. Leaders proposed a historic district designation, but failed to gain the support due to local opposition.



The Community Council was more successful with tree planting along significant boulevards and litter clean-up along busy thoroughfares. Victorian street lights were also installed along with a fountain by the Community Council.



In August of 1993, Varnville became a set for the major motion picture *Forest Gump*. Downtown Varnville was transformed to the look as if it were the 1950s. Many locals took part as extras. Millions of people have now seen Main Street Varnville. Residents came together, with their lawn chairs and blankets, to watch *Forest Gump* in celebration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Town. It was reminiscent of the 1930s outdoor movies shown in Varnville.

## 1.2 HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND SITES

Varnville's evolution has provided a wide-ranging mix of structures for housing, business and civic uses. Housing styles include the Lowcountry Farm-House and various Victorian styles near the core. As the town spreads out American bungalows gained prominence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century; more modern ranch-style homes were built on larger lots in the mid to late-20<sup>th</sup> century as the town built out over the years

### NATIONAL REGISTRY OF HISTORIC PLACES

❖ **Hattie J. Peeples House** (listed in 1992) – Construction of the single-family structure began in 1889 and was completed in October of 1893 for businessman Reverend E. W. Peeples, his wife Hattie J. Peeples, and family. The style was Victorian Italianate with Queen Anne influences. The house was built on a brick foundation with weatherboard siding and a metal roof.

Around 1885, a second structure was built for the butler's quarters. The style matched that of the main house. The structure included a buggy shed. The Peeples' servant lived in structure until his death in 1923.

In 1911, the Hattie J. Peeples House was the first home in Varnville to acquire electricity.

A third outbuilding was destroyed by fire in 1917 and replaced in 1920. From that time, the structure functioned as Varnville's post office until 1964. Mrs. Hattie Peeples served as postmaster from 1910 to 1941 when her daughter, Lucile Peeples Ginn, was appointed. She served until 1962.

Photos: Courtesy Tony Barnes



## VARNVILLE HISTORICAL SITES

**E.R. Ginn's Cotton Gin** -  
Circa 1892.



**Freeman House** - Built for Miles Freeman in 1910. Freeman was an area entrepreneur who ran a turpentine business. He also started The Pavilion which entertained many area residents over the years.



**Ginn House** - A Victorian Period home built for E.R. Ginn's wife as a wedding present in 1886. Senator Ginn served several terms in the South Carolina Legislature as well as mayor of Varnville. Ginn was a farmer and owner of The Ginn Saw Mill.





**Stone-Glenn House** - Circa 1911. Twentieth Century Bungalow Style. Built for John Stone of the Stone-Patrick Mill. Later Edgar C Glenn, the General Manager of the Big Salkehatchie Lumber Company, bought the house and built the second story around 1918.



**Mears House** - Once an academy and business school.



**Moxon House** - Dr. Geothe was Varnville's first physician. His office was located in the backyard, where he treated his patients. The Moxon House (Lowcountry Farmhouse) is thought to be one of Varnville's first homes.



**Old Varnville Gym** – Built in 1939 during the depression as a Work Progress Administration project.



**Patrick House** – Circa 1911. Built in the Neoclassical Revival Style.



**Thomas House** – Built after the turn of the Century for Sheriff C. V. Thomas.



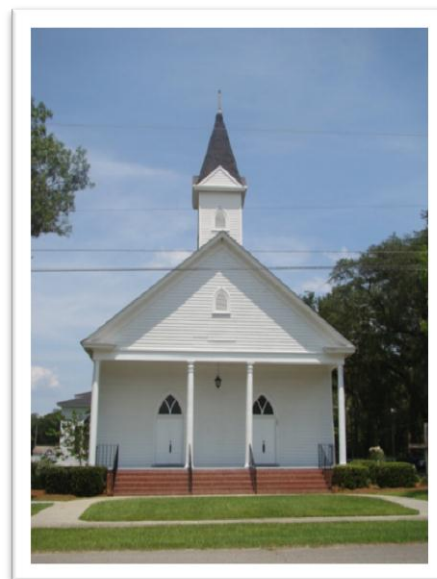
**United Methodist Church** – Originally built in the Victorian Period Carpenter Gothic Style. The congregation endured a fire 1870s, but the church was rebuilt in 1923.



**Varnville Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)** – Built between 1891 and 1895 in the Victorian Period with Gothic Style influences.



**Varnville First Baptist Church** – Built in 1878 in Victorian Period style and has expanded numerous times.



**Varnville Hardware and Supply Company** - Circa 1914. Built after a fire to include a drug store, furniture store, hardware store, and a doctor's office in the rear.



**Varnville Train Depot** - Built at the turn of the century for the Charleston & Western Carolina Railroad. Originally the depot was located at Palmetto and Main Street, but in 1996 the depot was moved to the Town Park.



**Vincent-Peebles House** - Circa 1894. Built in the Queen Ann style of the Victorian Period.





These enduring sites tell the story of the past through their tangibility in the present day community. Unlike so many other razed historical buildings, they are not just memories or photos from a bygone era, but offer texture to the physical structure of Varnville and possibly a pattern for future development. Therefore they, among others should be acknowledged and preserved for future generations to enjoy.

### **1.3 RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

With partial funding from the Alliance for a Smoke Free South Carolina and the support of the Town of Varnville, in 1996 the Varnville Recreational Trail opened. The trail was designed to promote fitness and the cultural resources in town. The trail is one of a kind as it has received the White House Millennium Award—the only trail in the Lowcountry Region to receive the honor. Students have used the trail as an educational tool for instruction on local architecture.

### **1.4 HISTORIC PRESERVATION STRATEGIES**

In order to maintain Varnville's character and identity for residents and visitors, the Town will collaborate with regional, state and federal entities to develop an effective preservation program. Through the actions and decisions of property owners, Town Council and the Planning Commission, Varnville's policies should include:

- ☞ Community Involvement: support local preservation efforts and organizations, encouraging public awareness of preservation issues and opportunities
- ☞ Development Regulations: The Town, through a revised Zoning Ordinance, should create Overlay Districts with design regulations in areas of historic concentration. This should include provisions to control demolition, incentives to encourage appropriate new infill development and rehabilitation of and additions to existing buildings. The Town of Varnville should create Design Guidelines to incorporate historic preservation needs and requirements.
- ☞ Historic Survey: A survey is needed to be conducted for all of Varnville to identify historic resources within the Town. This will be useful in order to place current and future buildings on the National Registry of Historic Places.
- ☞ Public Education: Community support is the key to any preservation effort. This should be a joint effort between the Town and regional and state historic preservation organizations and present and prospective builders and developers. Developers and builders should be made aware of the zoning incentives and tax advantages related to buildings with historic stature.
- ☞ Develop Financial Incentives: At the present time there is relatively little funding available for historic renovations and/or maintenance. New approaches, for instance through zoning, should be utilized.

## GOAL & IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES FOR PRESERVING HISTORIC RESOURCES

The goals and implementation strategies will become increasingly important as development pressures increase in Varnville. These will help maintain the quality of life that present residents enjoy and that will attract visitors, investors, and future residents.

**GOAL: Protect and enhance historic sites, structures and resources, and foster compatible new development to maintain the Town's historic and cultural character.**

OBJECTIVE 1: Protect historically significant resources by strengthening and enforcing development standards and regulations to ensure compatible development and redevelopment and to minimize encroachment by incompatible land uses.

1. Conduct a historic inventory survey in order to identify all resources of historic significance and whether they qualify for the National Registry for Historic Places.
2. Revise the zoning ordinance with specific provisions to avoid impacts to all historically significant sites and structures. The updated historic inventory should be used to direct development.
3. Revise the zoning ordinance in order to control demolition of historic resources and to limit demolition to only those buildings whose structural integrity has been compromised to be in a condition beyond viable repairs.
4. Provide additional incentives through the zoning ordinance to encourage compatible new development and adaptive re-use of existing structures.

OBJECTIVE 2: Support efforts to involve and educate all members of the Town's diverse communities in the process of preserving Varnville's historic resources.

1. Commit to an ongoing community education and communication program so that the advantages and benefits of preserving the Town's historic resources are clearly understood by residents, business owners, builders, developers and visitors.
2. In order to promote recreation among residents and tourism, the town should appropriate funds and seek grants for the Varnville Historical Walking Trail to maintain and expand the existing trail.
3. Develop a smart phone app to highlight the Town's Historical Walking Trail and other historical and cultural resources.

OBJECTIVE 3: Utilize Varnville's historic resources to develop a heritage tourism industry.

1. Partner with County, regional and state and private sector historic and tourism organizations to develop a heritage-based strategic recreation and tourism plan for the County.
2. Develop a smart phone app to highlight the Town's Historical Walking Trail and other historical and cultural resources.
3. Form a Main Street organization.

# Chapter 2: Natural Resources

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

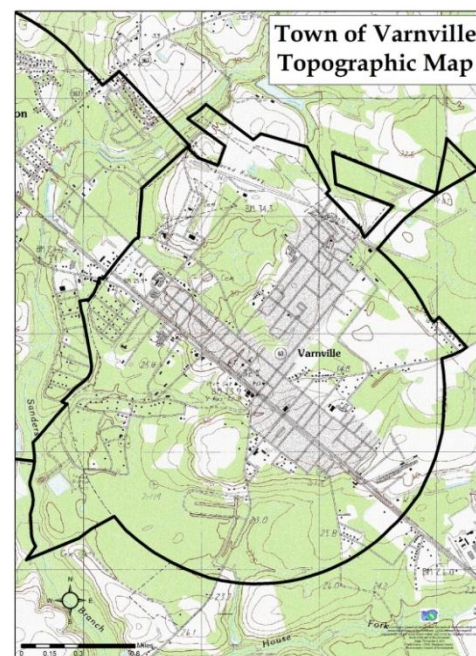
A community should strive to balance the preservation of natural resources and the need for economic development by encouraging compatible growth. This chapter discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the natural systems within Varnville along with the goals and objectives used to mitigate damage to these systems and property. As such, flood plains and wetlands may limit growth in areas, but benefits can be utilized with limited impacts on the environment. Wetlands help filter pollutants and can limit flooding; flood plains offer areas for recreational purposes and open space/natural areas; trees throughout the landscape can cool the environment to reduce the heat island effect and add an esthetic appeal; good and preserved soils promote agriculture and water quality.

## 2.2 CLIMATE

Varnville's climate is tempered by its proximity to the ocean. The average springtime high is a balmy 78.5 degrees; in the summer the high warms to an average 90.9 degrees; the fall average is a comfortable 78.2 degrees; and the winter average is a mild 62.2 degrees. The annual average precipitation is 47.71 inches. Thunderstorms occur on an average of 57 days. During most winters, Hampton County receives less than an inch of snow (South Carolina Climatology).

## 2.3 TOPOGRAPHY

Varnville is largely flat, but gently slopes from approximately 80 to 130 feet above sea level. A majority of the town's developed space rests on a higher elevation north of U.S. 278. The southern half of Varnville is dominated by evergreen forests as the northern part's land cover is further developed with intermittent forested wetlands and cultivated land. In Map 2.1 higher areas are represented by lighter colors.



Map 2.1: Topography

## **2.4 SOILS**

The Region is within the Atlantic Coast Flatwoods major land resource area where river-laid sediments are found close to the surface (USDA). The United States Department of Agriculture has surveyed 17 soil unit types within the Town of Varnville. Five dominant types include: Blanton fine sand (moderately wet), Bonneau fine sand (0-2 percent slope), Lynchburg loamy sand, Ocilla fine sand (0-2 percent slope), and Rains fine sandy loam (USDA). The soils in the Varnville area range from excessively drained to poorly drained depending on the location. Site development should consider soil limitations as some types require more modifications to drain water. Landscaping and lawns can also be limited by soil make-up and require nutrient application, drainage or irrigation for successful growing.

## **2.5 SURFACE WATER**

The Town is within the Salkehatchie River Basin, but does not have a river or stream inside the town limits. Just outside the boundary, on the western edge, the Sanders Branch Creek winds between Varnville and Hampton leading to the Coosawhatchie River which in due course empties into the Port Royal Sound. Portions of the Sanders Branch have been listed on the State's 2010 list of impaired waters due to bacterial contamination. Recreation uses are not supported as a result of excursions of fecal coliform (DHEC 2010). Although there are many factors that can contribute to high levels of fecal coliform, urbanized areas, by impervious surfaces, have been found to exacerbate the issue.

Wetlands are dynamic systems that provide excellent benefits for any community. Varnville has more than 223 acres of wetlands within the town limits according to the National Wetland Inventory. Forested wetlands make up a bulk of the existing wetlands in Varnville. These systems should be preserved for both water quality and biodiversity.

## **2.6 FLOOD PLAINS**

Although the Town does not have any rivers or streams, there are two areas that have been listed within FEMA flood zones, one location at the center-right top edge and another at the center lower edge along the Town boundary. These locations are shown on the following map (Map 2.2) Future development should be restricted in flood prone areas.

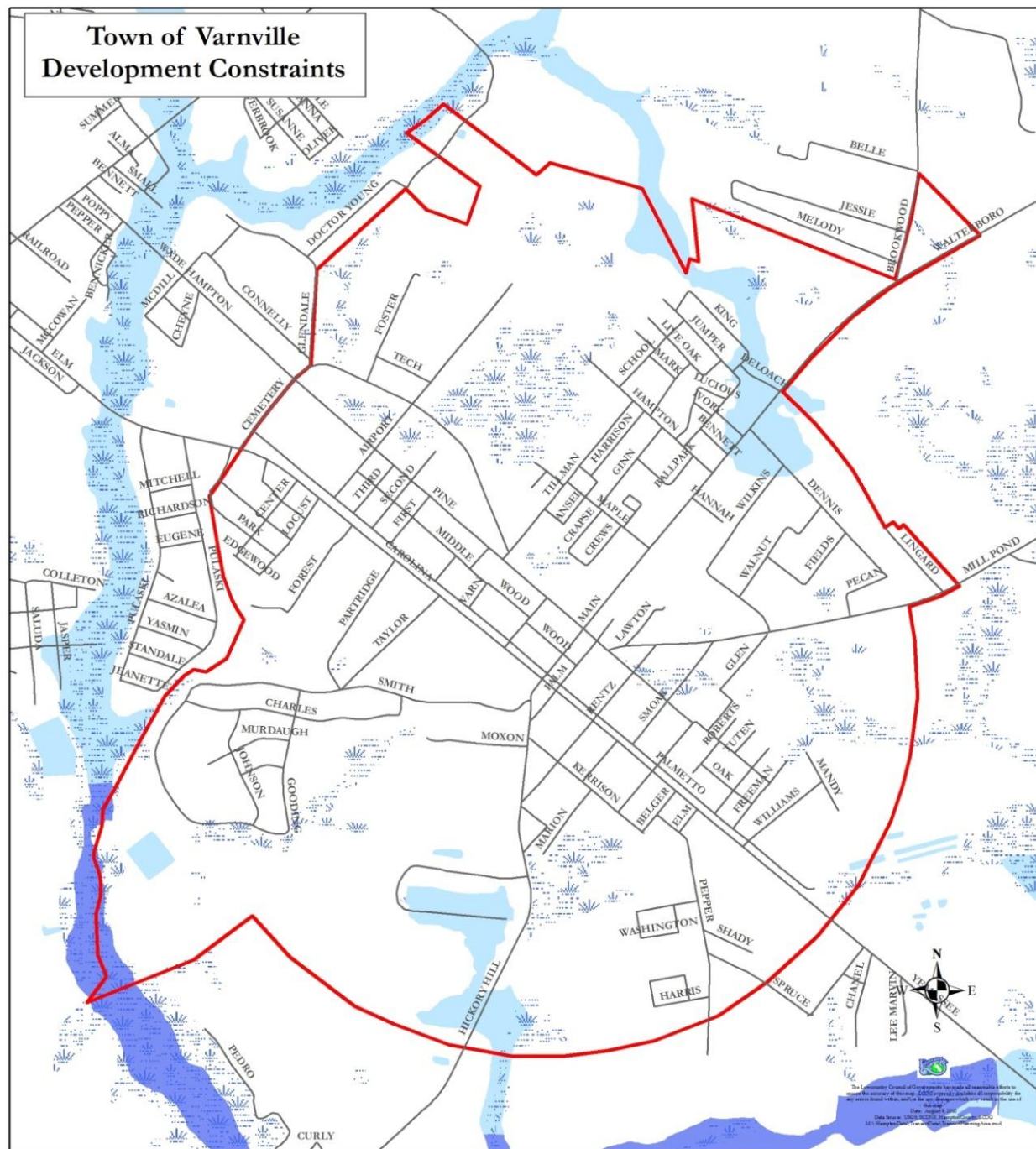


Figure 1.2: Town of Varnville Development Constraints



## 2.7 GROUNDWATER

Varnville draws from the Floridian Aquifer with three wells to supply the Town's drinking water system.

## 2.8 FLORA AND FAUNA

Tree cover is widespread in and around the Varnville area. Species include: loblolly pine, sweetgum, red maple, blackgum, and oaks on the upland. Bottomland trees include: water tupelo, swamp blackgum, bald cypress sweetgum, and red maple. Trees are imperative for the water cycle, biodiversity, esthetics, and cooling effects.

A variety of fauna in the area includes, but is not limited to: the white-tailed deer, feral hog, gray fox, raccoon, opossum, rabbit, armadillo, squirrel, turkey, and skunk.



For Hampton County, there are two species listed on the United States' endangered list, they include: one vertebrate animal – the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and one vascular plant -- Canby's Dropwort (SCDNR). A more detailed list of state designated species can be found at the DNR website: <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/species/pdf/hampton.pdf>.

Landscaping and development decisions can both inhibit and prohibit habitat for wildlife. Native species planting should be encouraged both for biodiversity and water conservation.

## 1.9 NATURAL RESOURCES GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

### GOAL: PROTECT STREAMS, RIVERS, AND WATERSHEDS.

1. Ensure the City has reliable sources of drinking water.
2. Collaborate with the Town of Hampton to protect the water quality of the Sanders Branch Creek
3. Improve watershed quality by reducing nonpoint source pollution through educating the public, enforcing regulations and new land use policies.

### GOAL: PROTECT WETLANDS AND USE CAUTION IN TERMS OF DEVELOPMENT IN AND AROUND HYDRIC SOILS.

1. Update current zoning ordinance and other development regulations to reflect the goal of protection and conservation of wetlands;
2. Develop minimum buffer requirements for wetlands;



3. Ensure that existing floodplains are maintained in a state where their essential natural functions can be performed.
4. Charge an additional mitigation fee for the loss or conversion of wetlands to contribute directly to the protection, restoration, and management of other wetlands in the City;

**GOAL: PROTECT CRITICAL ECOSYSTEMS, HABITATS AND ASSOCIATED FLORA AND FAUNA.**

1. Endangered species list should be reviewed in order to conserve when determining development requests.
2. Develop a plan for control and removal of invasive exotic plant species.
3. Develop a tree ordinance to protect existing and future tree canopies.
4. Encourage the use of native vegetation in all site development and landscaping to ensure that development will utilize water conservation practices.

**GOAL: UTILIZE URBAN GROWTH MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES.**

1. Inventory open space and natural areas to consider the development of a green infrastructure.
2. Protect land permanently through a variety of protective land conservation mechanisms such as easements.

**GOAL: TAKE ADVANTAGE OF NATURAL RESOURCE ECONOMICS.**

1. Expand and diversify wildlife recreation opportunities in the undeveloped areas of the Town of Varnville to increase tourism, gain larger local interests, and stimulate the economy.

# Chapter 3: Population

## 3.1 POPULATION GROWTH

Between 2000 and 2010, Census figures show that the population of the Town of Varnville increased by 88 persons, or slightly more than 4 percent. In themselves these numbers might not be considered significant, but compared to the rest of Hampton County, they are. During that period the entire county's population declined by 296 persons, with the Town of Estill losing 385 residents and the Town of Hampton 29.

**Table 3.1: Population Growth: Varnville and Hampton County**

	<b>Census 2000 Population</b>	<b>Census 2010 Population</b>	<b>Percent Change 2000-2010</b>
Hampton County	21,386	21,090	-1.40%
<b>Town of Varnville</b>	<b>2,074</b>	<b>2,162</b>	<b>4.07%</b>
Town of Estill	2,425	2,040	-18.87%
Town of Hampton	2,837	2,808	-1.03%
Town of Yemassee	807	1,027	21.42%
Balance of Hampton County	13,243	13,053	-1.46%

## 3.2 POPULATION FORECASTS TO 2026

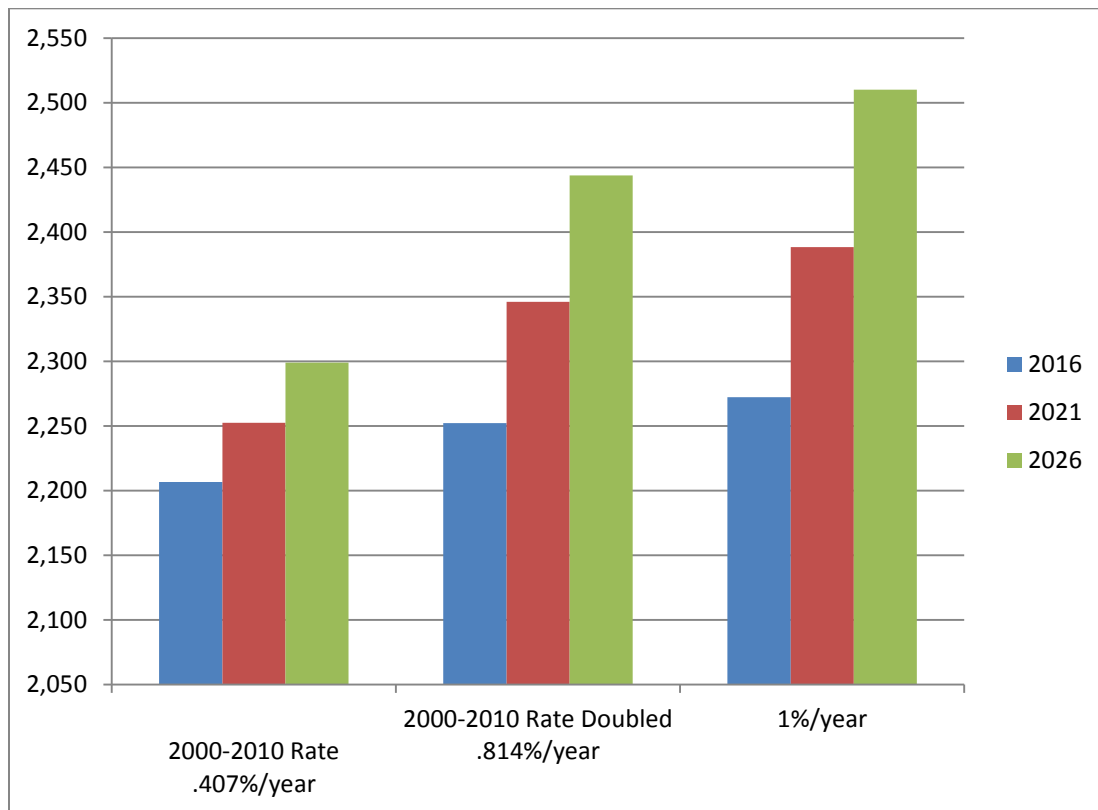
At the current time, due to an uncertain economic future, not only for Varnville but also for the Lowcountry, South Carolina and the United States, it is extremely difficult to forecast what scale of population growth Varnville can expect during the next 15 to 20 years. However, in order to plan to accommodate new development, the Town needs to be aware of what is possible. For that purpose, three sets of straight-line projections have been prepared.

The first projects population growth at five-year intervals using Varnville's average annual growth rate from 2000 to 2010; the second uses double that rate; the third increases by an average of 1 percent per year. The table and the chart below show those possible levels of growth

**Table 3.2 Varnville Population Projections**

	<b>2000-2010 Rate .407%/year</b>	<b>2000-2010 Rate Doubled .814%/year</b>	<b>1%/year</b>
2016	2,207	2,252	2,272
2021	2,252	2,346	2,388
2026	2,299	2,444	2,510

**Figure 3.1 Varnville  
Population Projections**



It is essential that they be updated annually, with the yearly release of population estimates by the Census, as the housing market and the economy change and as potential economic development projects both inside and outside the Town of Varnville come closer to being implemented.

### 3.3 INCOMES AND POVERTY

In spite of the fact that the economy has been in a downturn for the past several years, economic conditions in Hampton County, the Lowcountry and the state have improved between 2000 and 2009 or 2010, according to available indicators. **[Note:** This data is currently only available at the county level. If census information at the municipal level becomes available before the completion of this plan, this section will be revised to include Varnville's specific income and poverty conditions.]

**Table 3.3**

#### Median Family Incomes

County	2000 Census	2010 HUD Estimates	Percent Change
Beaufort	\$52,710	\$65,900	25.02%
Colleton	\$34,172	\$42,500	24.37%
<b>Hampton</b>	<b>\$34,561</b>	<b>\$43,000</b>	<b>24.42%</b>
Jasper	\$36,793	\$45,700	24.21%

**Table 3.4**

#### Poverty Levels

	1989/1990 (% of Total Population)	1999/2000 (% of Total Population)	2009 (% of Total Population)
Beaufort County	13.6	10.7	10.5
Colleton County	23.4	21.1	21.4
<b>Hampton County</b>	<b>27.7</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>20.2</b>
Jasper County	25.3	20.7	19.9
South Carolina	15.4	14.1	15.8

### 3.4 AGE GROUPS

#### AGE GROUPS

In common with the rest of the Lowcountry and the state of South Carolina, and the entire United States, Census data showed that the percentage of Hampton County's older population increased between 2000 and 2010, and the proportion of younger people—both children and younger adults—decreased during that period. Significant growth, however, occurred among the population aged 45 to 84. This is the group that generally has more wealth than younger age groups.

**Table 3.5: Age Group Composition**

Hampton County Age Groups					
	2010			2000	
□	Number	Percent		Number	Percent
□	□				
Τοταλ ποπυλατιον	21,090	100		21,386	100
Υνδερ 5 ψεαρς	1,347	6.4		1,431	6.7
5 το 9 ψεαρς	1,326	6.3		1,659	7.8
10 το 14 ψεαρς	1,473	7.0		1,774	8.3
15 το 19 ψεαρς	1,524	7.2		1,599	7.5
20 το 24 ψεαρς	1,229	5.8		1,256	5.9
25 το 34 ψεαρς	2,648	12.6		3,052	14.3
35 το 44 ψεαρς	2,915	13.8		3,290	15.4
45 το 54 ψεαρς	3,103	14.7		2,923	13.7
55 το 59 ψεαρς	1,420	6.7		1,010	4.7
60 το 64 ψεαρς	1,276	6.1		797	3.7
65 το 74 ψεαρς	1,655	7.8		1,447	6.8
75 το 84 ψεαρς	969	4.6		874	4.1
85 ψεαρς ανδ οπερ	305	1.4		274	1.3
Μεδιαν αγε (ψεαρς)	38.4			34.8	

**[Note:** This data is currently only available at the county level. If Census information at the municipal level becomes available before the completion of this plan, this section will be revised to include Varnville's specific age conditions.]

### 3.5 ETHNICITY

Varnville, and much of Hampton County, have not experienced the dramatic increase in Hispanic population that the rest of the Region has (see table below. As a result, the Town is not confronted with the problems of other communities in the Lowcountry and the rest of the Southeastern US. Given that migration from Latin American countries has slowed significantly during the past two years and that there is actually a repatriation of immigrants underway, it is not likely that Varnville will be impacted in the future.

**Table 3.6: Ethnicity**

	Census 2000 Population				Census 2010 Population			
	Total	One Race White	One Race Black	Hispanic or Latino, Any Race	Total	One Race White	One Race Black	Hispanic or Latino, Any Race
Hampton County	21,386	9,173	11,906	547	21,090	8,999	11,359	744
Town of Varnville	2,074	803	1,251	15	2,162	747	1,364	8
Town of Estill	2,425	438	1,926	79	2,040	361	1,594	98
Town of Hampton	2,837	1,569	1,204	23	2,808	1,415	1,280	48
Town of Yemassee	807	349	447	7	1,027	419	560	25
Balance of Hampton County	13,243	6,014	7,078	423	13,053	6,057	6,561	565
<b>Lowcountry Total</b>	<b>201,265</b>	<b>124,635</b>	<b>67,946</b>	<b>10,496</b>	<b>246,992</b>	<b>158,436</b>	<b>69,233</b>	<b>25,157</b>

**Note:** The numbers of white, black, other and Hispanic add up to more than the total populations because Hispanic residents have been counted as members of one or more of the other races as well.

### 3.5 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Hampton County's levels of educational attainment, including the percentage of adults who have graduated from high school, improved between 2000 and 2010, according to the US Census's American Community Survey. They are also generally better than those of the rest of the Lowcountry. However, the percentage of adults with either two-year or four-year degrees, though, is lower than two of the other four counties in the Lowcountry or the South Carolina average. This has important implications for economic development in the County, as discussed in Chapter 4.

**Table 3.7: Educational Attainment**

<b>Educational Attainment 2000</b>	Beaufort County	Colleton County	<b>Hampton County</b>	Jasper County	South Carolina	United States
Less Than High School Diploma or equivalent	12.16%	30.38%	<b>33.07%</b>	34.85%	23.66%	19.60%
High School	24.17%	36.95%	<b>37.76%</b>	35.94%	29.97%	28.63%
Some College, Associates	30.45%	21.12%	<b>19.10%</b>	20.48%	25.95%	27.37%
Bachelors	21.59%	7.38%	<b>7.20%</b>	6.16%	13.54%	15.54%
Graduate	11.63%	4.16%	<b>2.88%</b>	2.57%	6.88%	8.86%
<b>Educational Attainment 2008</b>						
Less Than High School Diploma or equivalent	9.80%	22.37%	<b>22.70%</b>	26.88%	17.85%	15.47%
High School	24.64%	42.71%	<b>43.08%</b>	39.95%	32.07%	29.57%
Some College, Associates	28.67%	22.41%	<b>23.93%</b>	24.26%	26.86%	27.54%
Bachelors	23.21%	9.32%	<b>7.65%</b>	5.69%	15.06%	17.34%
Graduate	13.67%	3.19%	<b>2.63%</b>	3.22%	8.16%	10.07%

[**Note:** This data is currently only available at the county level and up to 2008. If Census information at the municipal level and to 2010 becomes available before the completion of this plan, this section will be revised to include Varnville's specific educational attainment conditions.]

### 3.6 GOAL & IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES FOR POPULATION

GOAL: Ensure that future development and redevelopment within Varnville's current and future municipal boundaries meets the needs and utilizes the resources of its present and future residents as effectively as possible.

1. Monitor population data as it becomes available every year.
2. Incorporate those changes into the Comprehensive Plan and ensure that the Zoning Ordinance is modified as needed to reflect changes.



## Chapter 4: Economy

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A balanced and well-functioning economy is one that is dynamic, diverse, and sustainable. Diversity in the local economy allows for a wider range of employment and career opportunities for employees and entrepreneurs and also ensures the attraction and retention of qualified and educated workers. An economy that is diverse will attract a wider array of business prospects. A community with diversity in business opportunities, a trained and educated work force, and a dynamic economy is one that functions successfully even during economic downturns.

A diverse economy also provides a balance among its taxable properties between residential and commercial assessments. When a community has a preponderance of residential development, homeowners become responsible for most of that jurisdiction's expenses, leading to higher tax rates, unhappy taxpayers and—over the longer term—fewer municipal services. Therefore it is important to ensure that new development includes a mix of retail, other commercial operations and industry, as well as residential.

It is also an economy that provides employment for its population, permitting them to work nearer to home instead of forcing them to commute distances beyond its boundaries. According to the most recent data available from the American Community Survey (2009), the average commute time for employed Varnville residents was 35.3 minutes; for all of Hampton County it was 29.7 minutes.

Varnville is fortunate in terms of its location. In fact, it has transportation and other advantages that communities throughout the United States would envy. Located less than ten miles from an Interstate 95 exit and with a freight railway line running through it, there is some potential for industrial development, especially at the southern end of town (see subsection 4.4). The fact that it is located on US 278, the main route between Hilton Head and Atlanta, provides even more potential for tourism development.

### 4.1 RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

In the past several years, Varnville's market advantages for retailers have not only been discovered but acted upon by three discount chains, including Dollar General in 2011. Since it is known that this most recent chain of stores analyzes potential sites well before deciding to build, it is likely that other chains will also look favorably at the Town in the foreseeable future. With stores wishing to have operations in Varnville, the Town is in the enviable position of ensuring that the design, siting and landscaping of future retailers is regulated through its new zoning ordinance to produce results that contribute to the Town's ability to attract new residents, other new businesses and visitors. The following photo is of a recently completed discount chain store in a rural area in Beaufort County.



A Chain Store with a Lowcountry Design

## 4.2 TRANSPORTATION AND TOURISM

Varnville needs to take advantage of traffic moving through the region via U.S. 278, attracting visitors and providing opportunities for existing businesses to grow and for new businesses to get started.

In the “Transportation” section of this Plan a number of small-scale, inexpensive improvements for the US 278 corridor are discussed. All have the objective of encouraging as many as possible of the more than 8000 vehicles that drive through Varnville on average every day to stop and spend some time and patronize local businesses.

Among the improvements that should be included are “way-finding” signage to encourage drivers from Augusta, Atlanta, Hilton Head and other areas to make unplanned trips off the highway and into and through historic Varnville. This will include directions to “Forrest Gump” movie sites in Varnville. Both large and sophisticated tourist cities, such as Paris and New York, and small communities such as Marfa, TX and Beaufort, SC have found it lucrative to make sure that visitors know how to find the scenes of their favorite movies.

## 4.3 WORKFORCE

Both Lowcountry local governments and the State of South Carolina have come to realize that a workforce educated and trained for both existing and prospective jobs will be a major marketing advantage in attracting new businesses and institutions. Varnville can take advantage of the area's increasing educational attainment levels (see "Population" section) and the new initiatives in place or under way in local post-secondary educational institutions to ensure that the Town's is able to offer a trained, labor force relevant to economic diversification in the twenty-first century.

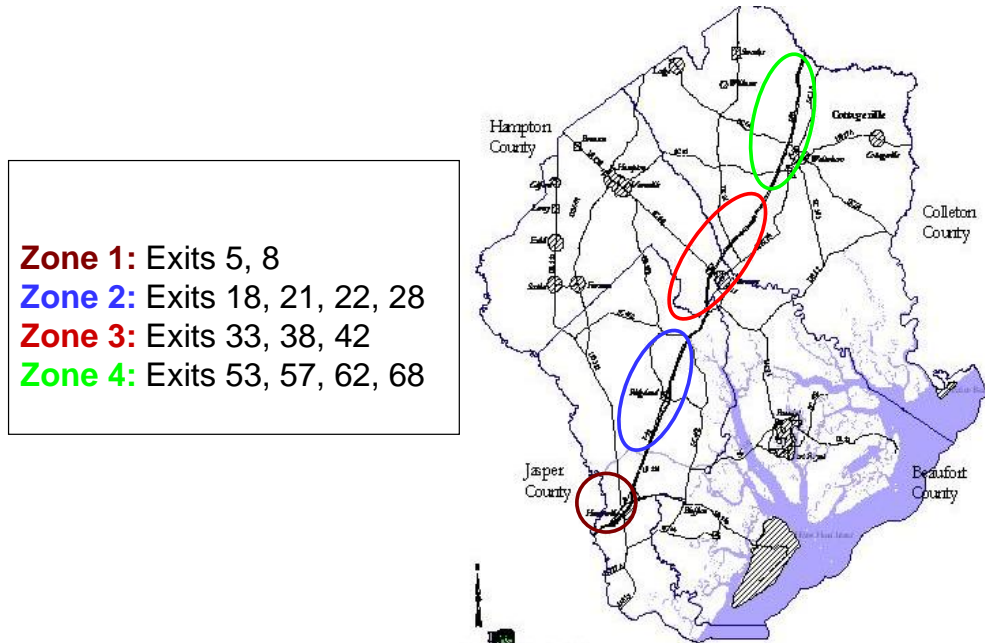
- ***Post Secondary Education.*** *The public and private colleges and* universities available in the Lowcountry region (including USCB, TCL, USC-Salkehatchie, Webster and Park universities) to Varnville residents provide a diverse spectrum of programs that provide the student with either certificate, diploma, undergraduate or graduate degrees.
- ***Continuing Education.*** TCL offers continuing educational programs geared towards those already in the work force or those that have been out of school for some time. Currently the Lowcountry has geared much of its continuing education towards the health sector. Other continuing education courses available in the region are: Building Construction, Computer Training, Culinary Arts, Insurance, Massage Therapy, Occupational Upgrade, Real Estate - Appraisal and Continuing Ed., English/Spanish as a Second Language.
- ***WIA.*** The Lowcountry Workforce Investment Area (WIA) department at LCOG is also involved in the training of prospective job seekers and the area's youth. WIA staff work with the area's educational institutions to help direct those looking for work force education and training and to determine current and future employment trends. Not only does the WIA provide job specific training for prospective employees but it also provides workshops and programs pertaining to work ethics and appearance in order to increase the likelihood of an employee performing to the level expected by employers.

## 4.4 MANUFACTURING

Several years ago, a *Lowcountry Economic Diversification Plan*, financed mostly by the Department of Defense, looked at manufacturing possibilities for the area (as well as other potential economic development).

For this part of the study they concentrated on the area near Interstate 95, which included at least as far west as the existing industrial park in what was designated Zone 3 . While Varnville does not have large enough sites to attract major industries, and is slightly too far from the interstate to attract others, there are types of companies identified in the plan that offer considerable potential.

# I-95 Economic Development Zones



According to the consultants that prepared the plan, the following North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) industries might find it beneficial to locate operations in Varnville:

- ◇ 42, 44-45 – Distribution/Logistics
  - Target company distribution/logistics emphasis to include:
    - Machinery
    - Electrical equipment
    - Appliances
    - Transportation equipment
- ◇ 3219 – Wood product manufacturing (wood windows and doors, millwork, etc.)
- ◇ 3212 – Veneer, plywood and engineered wood product manufacturing (hardwood veneer, truss manufacturing, OSB, MDF, etc.)
- ◇ 3323 – Architectural and structural metals manufacturing (metal windows and doors, ornamental and architectural metal work, prefab metal building and components, etc.)

- ◊ 3362 – Motor vehicle body and trailer manufacturing (utility trailers, motor homes, campers, motor vehicle bodies and cabs, etc.)
- ◊ 3261 – Plastics product manufacturing (floor coverings, pipe and fittings, building materials, packaging materials, countertops, plastic bottles, etc.)

**Note:** Since the plan predated the recession, especially those industries related to building and construction will not likely be candidates for the time being.

## **GOAL & IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES FOR THE ECONOMY**

Both the economic development climate and local and regional attitudes have changed considerably in the past few years, but the strategic advantages of Varnville's location and the related economic opportunities still exist. Plans should be made to benefit from them as the economy improves.

**GOAL: Develop a diversified economic base for Varnville that will provide jobs that pay at least the state average wage.**

1. Work with the Hampton County Economic Development Commission and the Economic Development Director.
2. Maintain planning and infrastructure policies necessary to attract the identified candidate businesses to Varnville.
3. Utilize transportation, as well as historic and community, assets to attract tourism
4. To attract movie, video and commercial production activities—which generate both direct expenditures and follow-up tourism—Varnville should promote its visual assets, namely its historic buildings and its unique community character.
  - \* Establishment of a Film Commission to work with the state Film Office to promote the area. Their work would include obtaining discounts for food, lodging and other services from local businesses;
  - \* Making unused public buildings and spaces available to production companies at no charge;
  - \* Providing police protection at reduced or no charge.
5. Develop cooperative working relationships with Yemassee, Hampton and Estill to stress local economic development, in which everyone benefits.

# Chapter 5: Land Use

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION



Varnville is prominently located on U.S. Highway 278, which bisects the town, serves as the backbone of the commercial corridor, and ushers residents and visitors from end to end. Throughout the nearly level landscape are distinctive homes, abundant natural resources, spirited businesses, and lively streets. Because of Varnville's appeal, location and affordability, opportunities exist for future quality growth. This chapter outlines a basic framework for a balanced and orderly pattern of development for the Town of Varnville. The concepts included in this chapter are designed specifically to guide future development in ways that make more efficient use of

existing and planned public facilities and services, while preserving and extending the distinctive character of the Town. The framework is not intended to be a detailed design for future development, but rather is intended as a guide for making development decisions, both public and private. The recommendations included in this chapter should be used as the basis for future detailed development strategies in the Town; they will include suggestions and proposed uses of the land to be added to Varnville.

## 5.2 EXISTING LAND USE

The current land use patterns are only a snapshot in time. The land use map will help citizens and decision-makers see how the Town's land uses fit together and how the land-use pattern could evolve in the future.

Fifty-six percent of Varnville's land use is dominated by forests, scrub, wetlands, and agriculture. Residential uses are 20 percent, commercial uses are two percent, and industrial uses are 1.4 percent of the total land use. Current land use suggests that Varnville is a bedroom community with strong key institutions, which are the third most dominant use in town.

Land-Use Classification		
Use	Acres	Percentage
Natural Resources	1646	55.8%
Residential	579	19.6%
Institutional	343	11.6%
Commercial	65	2.2%
Vacant	53	1.8%
Park & Conservation	52	1.8%
Industrial	41	1.4%
RR Right of Way	39	1.3%
Mobile Home Park	7	0.2%

Table 5.1: Land Use Classification

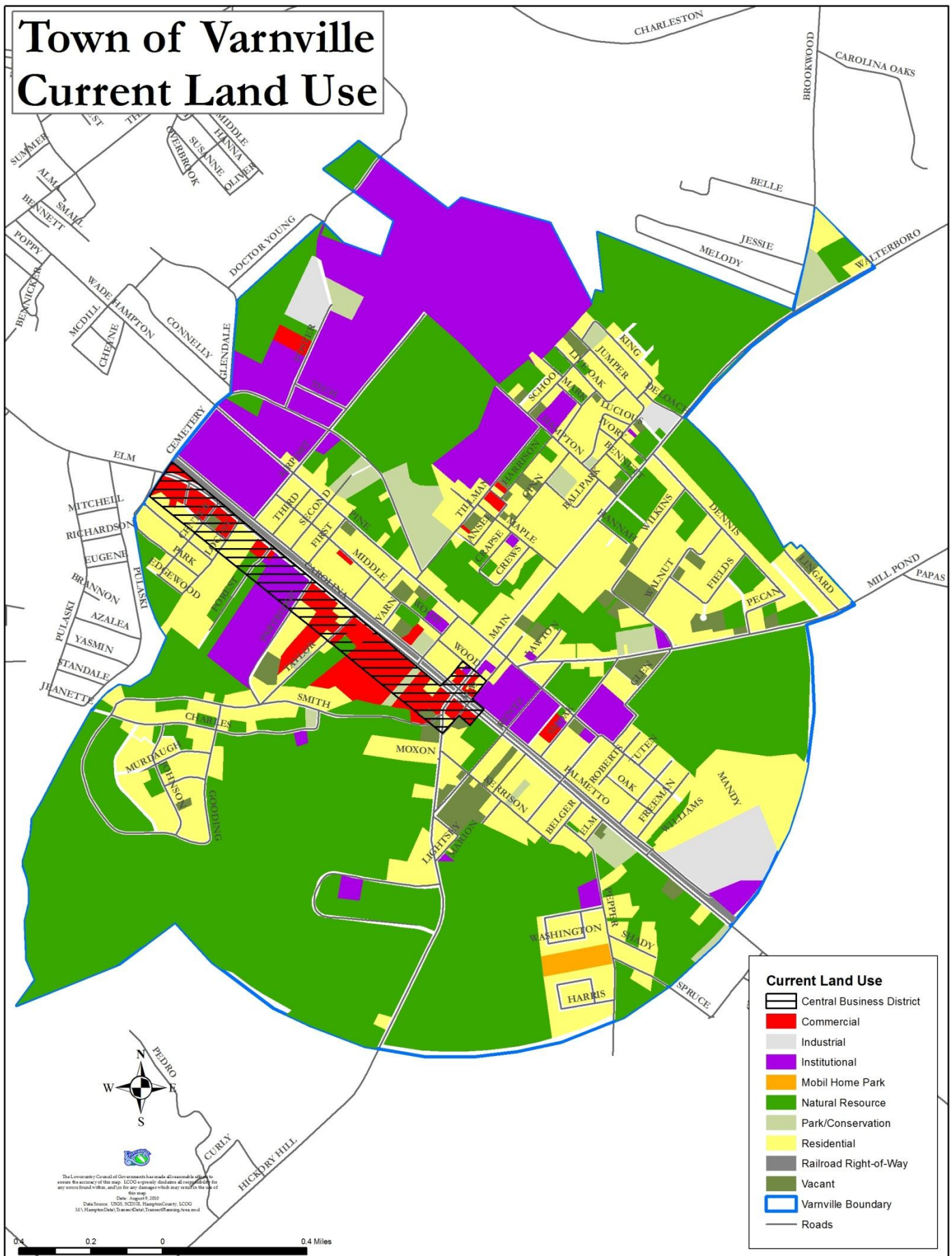
Key institutions include public facilities, schools, churches, and the hospital — amenities that strengthen the social fabric. Institutions are important in all Varnville neighborhoods present and future.

Conservation and park area is 1.8 percent of the total areas highlighted in Table 5.1. Recreational land uses are significant to Varnville residents too as demonstrated by the popular Friday night football and community softball games.

Vacant properties, 1.8 percent of the total land use, are sporadic throughout Varnville. These parcels offer Varnville residents and future residents opportunities to strengthen existing neighborhoods.



# Town of Varnville Current Land Use



Map 5.1: Current Land Use Map

## 5.3 DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

In recent years, Varnville has expanded areas of commercial development along U.S. 278 in terms of retail services. Areas of infill have included a tasteful mix of residential development within the existing infrastructure. The hospital grounds have encompassed a new facility while utilizing the remaining land.

A 2011 survey completed for the National Association of Realtors found that:

*“Overall, Americans’ ideal communities have a mix of houses, places to walk, and amenities.”*

Varnville is an accessible community with a variety of uses, as described above. The homes are mixed throughout with access to restaurants, a hospital and retail. Today, the town exhibits features of smaller lots, shallow setbacks, and even the characteristic front porch—qualities that are highly sought after in the housing market. Varnville can use the context of the existing neighborhoods to build on these qualities and increase the possibilities through reinforcing the housing stock by building on vacant sites.

According to U.S. Census Bureau figures, 21 percent of housing units in Varnville have at least one person over the age of 65. Area land use decisions can help residents live in their neighborhoods longer—if not for a lifetime. Varnville residents of all ages can appreciate being close to medical facilities, grocery stores, pharmacies and parks. However, improvements can be made to enhance crosswalks through major intersections, offer homes with level entrances and single floors. All people will benefit from multi-generational neighborhoods.

## 5.4 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Varnville should plan for orderly patterns consistent with the values laid out in the Comprehensive Plan while prioritizing development within the existing community and lastly annexation. The Town will provide adequate land to accommodate appropriate demands for residential, commercial, and industrial uses. Development should pay for itself.

Designated development areas encourage managed growth. Development areas are **NOT** zoning districts in that they do not establish boundaries within which certain specific uses are permitted and others are excluded. Development areas are intended to guide quality growth in order to avoid haphazard extensions. Three priority areas have been identified in Varnville.

### **Historic Gateway**

The highway corridor lends to the first impression of the Town, and accordingly should be considered as a priority in terms of economic development. Varnville's commercial corridor offers retail and automobile services to Varnville and Hampton residents as well as to people living in the rural settings around the Town. This passage is critical for capturing the road traffic that moves through by way of U.S. 278 back and forth from Augusta to Hilton Head Island.

As part of the Historic Gateway, Downtown Varnville could easily accommodate studios, galleries, and other unique shops that can adapt to the vintage storefronts. In some cases, historic homes may be used for bed-and breakfast inns, crafts, antiques, and second-hand items. At the intersection of Palmetto and Main, or the geographic center of Town, lighting, streetscape design, and signage will enrich the public realm enticing travelers and residents to spend time in Historic Downtown Varnville.

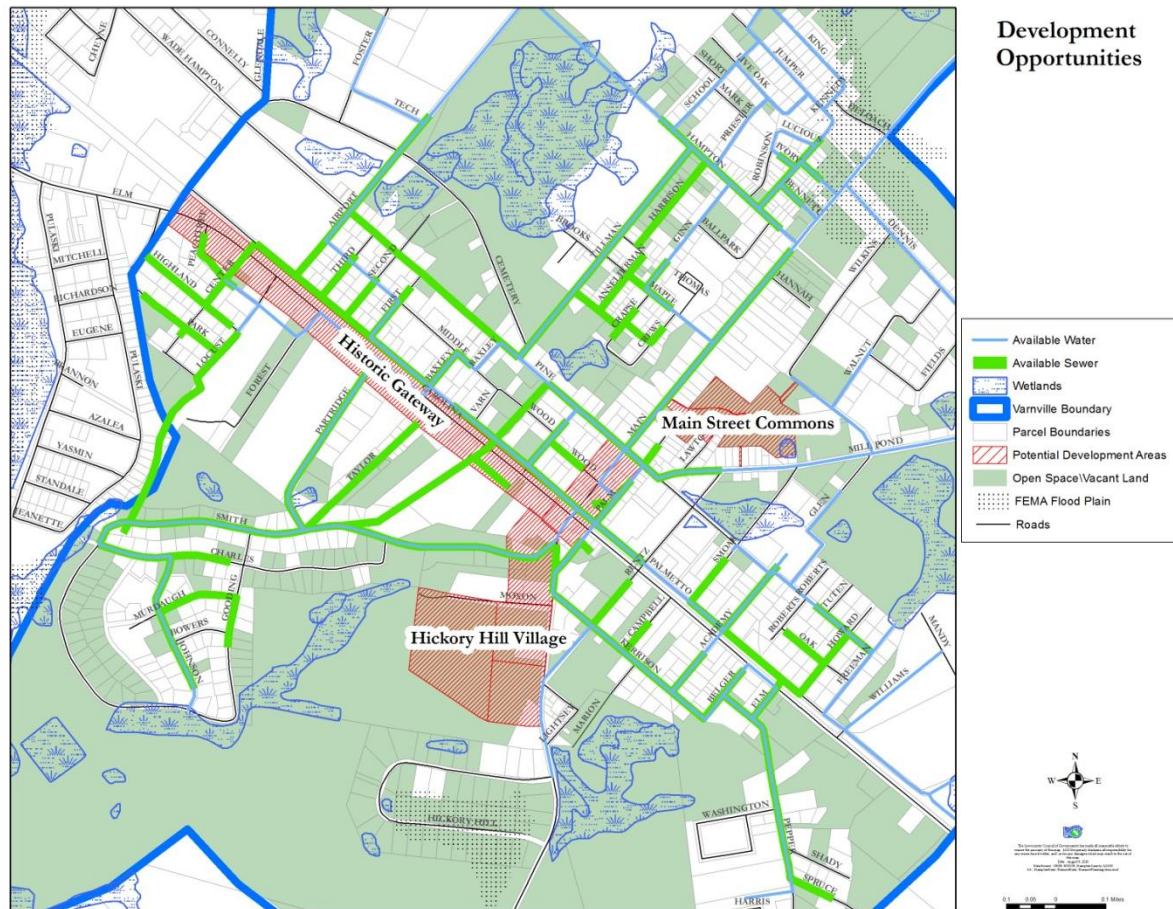
### **Existing Neighborhoods**

Available spaces within existing community have prospects for residential redevelopment as many neighborhoods have distinctive design and quality of life traits. Vacant sites within the Town's core will, for the most part have access to community facilities and infrastructure, which may well reduce the cost of development.

North of Downtown, near central Varnville, a 14-acre parcel is vacant. Oaks and pines appear throughout the site and other natural features bend thru the landscape. This site is ideal for a compact neighborhood that would feature natural amenities through a shared common space. The concept, "Main Street Commons", would include a mix of housing sizes at higher densities with elements of regional vernacular --offering current and future Varnville residents varied housing options.

### **Hickory Hill Village**

South of Downtown, on the west side of the road, a potential "Hickory Hill Village" would be a phased development that grasps and extends the distinct identity of the Town's core and would specialize in the needs of today's homes and businesses. These activities would be designed clustered together and offer places where people can gather such as a corner pub, coffee and ice cream shops or even a deli. Services such as doctor, dentist, accountant and real estate offices would fit nicely as well. These activities will consequently increase the accessibility of services for all residents. A community village will be served by existing water and sewer systems, or will be located where efficient extensions can be made to support the new development.



**Map 5.2: Development Opportunities**

Map 5.2 highlights the three developments areas, vacant/open space, as well as wetlands, and water and sewer availability. Growth however is not limited to the emphasized areas.

## 5.6 REGIONAL TRENDS

Regional land use and economic development changes will have a profound impact on the local economy in Varnville, and in turn provide development opportunities and change the landscape in and around the Town. Two studies undertaken by LCOG have shown that the Lowcountry is well positioned for distribution and logistics centers for the freight industry. While economic prospects remain uncertain, Varnville's location near the new industrial park and a relatively short distance from I-95, will ultimately provide prospects for development associated with Regional Progress.

Vacant warehouses within Varnville may be appropriate for redevelopment in the logistics or light manufacturing industry.

Current regional developments of interest include:



- By 2014 Highway 68 will have four lanes extended from the current position to the Industrial Park making freight more feasible. As business increases in the area, Varnville is likely to see benefits.
- At this point the Jasper Port is in the planning and negotiation stages; however the development of this port will ultimately have an immense impact on the region. Varnville could ultimately provide labor and land for industries related to the port.

## **5.7 GOALS & IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES FOR LAND USE**

### **GOAL A: ESTABLISH A BASE FOR GROWTH IN THE TOWN CENTER AND ENHANCE ITS ROLE AS THE ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL HUB FOR THE COMMUNITY.**

Objective 3. Encourage development, retention and expansion of convenience retail, businesses and services in the Town center to support the area's residential uses.

Objective 4. Continue efforts to encourage the development of a mix of housing choices for all income levels in and adjacent to the Town center to increase the vitality of the area during the morning, daytime, and evening hours.

### **GOAL B: ENHANCE CONNECTIVITY WITHIN AND BETWEEN RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL AREAS.**

Objective 1: New roads and sidewalks should extend the Town's traditional grid pattern and suburban cul-de-sacs should be discouraged.

Objective 2: Allow for mixed use in zones within the Town's core in the new Zoning Ordinance.

### **GOAL C: AS THE TOWN ANNEXES LAND, THE SAME PLANNING PRINCIPLES SHOULD BE CARRIED FORWARD TO THE NEW MUNICIPAL BOUNDARIES.**

Objective 1: Review all Planned Developments for compliance with this Plan and the new Zoning Ordinance.

### **GOAL D: STRENGTHEN THE EXISTING NEIGHBORHOODS THROUGH DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT.**

Objective 1: Identify distressed properties for possible redevelopment.

Objective 2: Offer tax and/or zoning incentives for infill development.

# Chapter 6: Housing

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Housing is perhaps Varnville's greatest asset. The community offers a wide-ranging mix of housing along tree-lined streets near parks and schools, and at affordable prices for consumers in a range of incomes. Housing needs will differ depending on the individual circumstances of the present and future residents of Varnville. Some will need larger homes for a big family; others will need smaller homes or apartments. In the future, housing preferences will inevitably change with the times. Households grow or diminish, add new young members or age. Planning for housing can be complex with the changes in demand and financial conditions both of individuals and the nation. This chapter will describe the state of housing and the implications for present and future residents.



## 6.2 INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, between 2000 and 2010, Varnville's housing stock increased units by 8.3 percent to 939 from 867, or by 72 units. The increase didn't occur in one area, but happened in a dispersed manner throughout the Town. Varnville did not experience the rapid build-up during the housing boom of the 2000s, as seen in other areas within the Region. At first this may appear unfortunate, but in fact, it is

encouraging for future housing development, because Varnville does not have a significant surplus of housing units on the market.

Housing Units			
	2010 Census	2000 Census	Change 2000- 2010
Total Housing Units	939	867	8%
Occupied Housing	800	799	0.1%
Vacant	139	68	104%
Vacancy Status			
For rent	33	19	74%
For sale only	16	14	14. %
For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use	20	9	122%
Other vacant	70	26	169 %

**Table 6.1: Housing Units** Source: U.S. Census

Vacancies have increased to 14.8 percent of the total housing units between 2000 and 2010. Vacancies are lower than that of Hampton County as a whole (17 percent). For sale vacant units increased slightly in absolute terms between 2000 and 2010. Rental vacancies increased at a higher rate (74%).

Varnville's homeowner vacancy rate is at 2.9 percent – lower than that of the state-wide rate of 3.2 percent. Generally, a rate below 3 percent indicates a tighter housing market. Varnville's population is projected to increase modestly in the future. Therefore, the Town will be in a good position to gradually add housing as the economy recovers. The renter vacancy rate commonly leans higher than the homeowner rate because of the time frame of rental intervals. In 2010, Varnville's rental vacancy rate was 10.8 percent – a lower rate than South Carolina, which stood at 13.9 percent.

As stated, there has been an increase of general vacancies, as Figure 1 demonstrates, which may indicate the presence of distressed properties. Through conducting a land use survey, it was noted that distressed properties are not clustered, but are scattered throughout the community. A housing survey to evaluate the statuses of the vacancies would be useful for an accurate and specific understanding of the condition of housing within the Town. The survey would investigate the quality and age of the existing stock, serve as a baseline for the community, and help decision-makers take an active role in developing modern and safe market rate and affordable housing. A potential result may be a detailed neighborhood redevelopment program and ordinances to address the issues of distressed housing, in case that becomes an important issue in the Town.

The Town has a strong percentage of owner-occupied housing, as the figure to the right shows. There was only a slight decline in the ten year period between 2000 and 2010. High percentages of owner-occupancy tend to reinforce neighborhoods, as people invest more in the appearance and maintenance of the property they both own and live in compared to rental properties.

Housing Tenure					
	Census 2010	Percentage of Occupied Units	Census 2000	Percentage of Occupied Units	Change 2000-2010
Owner Occupied	531	66%	554	70%	-4%
Renter Occupied	269	34%	245	31%	10%

**Table 6.2: Housing Tenure**

Source: U.S. Census

The number of renter-occupied homes also increased in the same ten-year period. Renting is usually more affordable than purchasing a home, and there are always segments of the population that will not be able to purchase their own homes. During the past several years it has become more difficult for many people to buy a home than it was previously, due to more stringent credit and down payment requirements. This

increasing trend may mean an increased market for additions to the rental market in Varnville. The Town should develop a blend of affordable well-kept units as well as higher-end amenity-rich rental units, some in mixed use neighborhoods. Housing associated with shops and studios can add vibrancy to downtown areas and village neighborhoods that appeal to folks, especially young people.

Some homebuyers will want newly constructed housing with all the latest advances in architecture, others will want the character of Varnville's historic properties, and some will want both.

Through well planned infill development in the existing neighborhoods, Varnville can meet increased demand for new homes while utilizing infrastructure that already exists. Innovative housing that is designed for universal use -- adaptable, accessible, and open, with shared recreational facilities for all ages, is an approach that will accommodate the needs of a changing population.

Cottage-style homes, in compact neighborhoods or small neighborhood villages, will increase the opportunity for new and more affordable housing. The Town will still offer development opportunities for traditional single-family dwellings with larger lots and homes that appeal to families, but a variety of homes and apartments, that address the needs of a fairly wide variety of people, will help ensure that the Town's housing market will remain viable as the lifestyles of present and future residents change through their lifespans.





### **6.3 HOUSING AFFORDABILITY**

There are many forces in the national, state, and regional economies that will influence the housing market in Varnville. A variety of dynamics impact the affordability of housing including: the finance system, employment and wages, land and construction costs, the provision of water and sewer services, and regulatory requirements. Varnville cannot do much about lending practices, but it can support County and Regional economic development and ensure that Town policies and ordinances can minimize the cost and promote the quality and affordability of housing.

Housing is considered affordable when the total cost is no more than 30 percent of the household's monthly gross income. According to the Census Bureau's 2009 Estimate, the median family income in Varnville was \$24,110. Using the 30 percent of gross income ratio, the median household could have afforded payments of \$604 a month for housing. With a 30 year mortgage at 6 percent and assuming the buyer has a 20 percent down payment (unless the buyer qualifies for a Veterans Administration or USDA loan), a family could purchase a home for approximately \$100,000 – in line with the census estimates of the median value of housing in Varnville at \$90,400. Local real estate professionals indicate that the approximate average of a rental unit in Varnville is \$450 a month, which fits well within the \$604 per month.

### **6.4 HOUSING STRATEGIES**

The Town of Varnville can utilize several strategies to promote affordable housing. These efforts will likely include cooperation with the Lowcountry Council of Governments' affordable housing programs. Other efforts will incorporate policies and ordinances within the Town's purview.

- Rehabilitation programs to address substandard housing conditions;
- Development standards to ensure quality residential development and to protect residential neighborhoods from incompatible development ;
- Flexible regulations to encourage new development of a wide variety of housing types for all income levels;
- Zoning incentives for developers and builders to provide affordable housing units.

## **Housing Rehabilitation**

The Town should continue to seek out grants and loans to rehabilitate housing in distressed lower-income neighborhoods. Housing rehabilitation programs will align with the emphasis on strengthening existing communities.

- **HOME Program from HUD** - This federally funded program, administered by the Lowcountry Regional HOME Consortium, works to rehabilitate housing for low to moderate income residents. Varnville began a plan in 2010 to rehabilitate four units within the Town. This is a \$100, 000 dollar program that focuses on structural issues such as roofs, windows, and foundations. Currently, three of the four units have been completed, with the work on the fourth starting soon.
- **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)** work to improve the infrastructure of neighborhoods. Varnville has recently been granted funds for pump stations and water looping projects. As neighborhoods have better access to community facilities the more affordable they become.

Varnville should remain attentive to the availability of CDBG and HOME grants as funds become less readily available and more competitive in the future.

## **Quality Residential Development**

Thoughtful consideration of the site design and infrastructure needs can help reduce the cost of development. As Varnville works to strengthen existing neighborhoods, the Town can simultaneously address affordable housing. Development costs will in the long run be lower as public and private investments focus on developing new homes where infrastructure already exists. As part of the existing community, such infill development should follow the basic building design, types, scale and styles and the densities of the neighborhoods.



Special consideration should be given to manufactured homes –historically used as a method of affordable housing. Through the years manufactured housing has evolved to include high-end dwelling units as well as improved design standards. As these units are installed, they should conform to Town-mandated zoning and design standards for a safe and attractive dwelling unit. Future zoning ordinances should address appearance standards and foundation requirements. Manufactured housing should be integrated throughout the town.

### **Flexible Development Regulations**

Varnville has a unique opportunity, as the Town rewrites the Zoning Ordinance, to ensure that a diverse set of development needs are met. Flexible regulations may include an expedited permitting process, waived parking requirements, bonus densities and reduced lot size and set back requirements for affordable housing developments. However, these incentives should remain sensitive to the context of the existing community. Building codes, zoning, and development requirements should be easy-to-understand and accessible for subdividing property, setting up manufactured homes, building new residential units, and renovating or expanding existing dwellings.

## **6.5 THE LINK BETWEEN HOUSING AND PUBLIC FACILITIES**

When housing demand again grows, it may be necessary to provide new infrastructure and other services to accommodate the new units. In those cases the Town of Varnville should guide residential growth into areas that are planned for public infrastructure improvements and to ensure that the costs of these improvements are fully supported by the new development.

Residential growth also brings with it increased requirements for other community services such as fire protection, law enforcement, emergency services, and public health. The type and quality of services that the Town of Varnville will offer to the public will play key roles in determining the amount and type of residential growth and also the costs.

## **6.6 HOUSING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

**GOAL: ENSURE THAT ALL RESIDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO QUALITY AFFORDABLE HOUSING.**

Objective 1: The Town will continue to aggressively pursue grants through the HOME and CDBG programs.

Objective 2: The Town will foster effective and efficient public/private relationships to provide for the provision of affordable housing.

Objective 3: The new Zoning Ordinance will include flexible regulations and incentives for the development of affordable housing.

**GOAL: THE TOWN WILL ENSURE QUALITY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT THROUGHOUT THE MUNICIPALITY.**

Objective 1. The Town will develop a housing survey to ensure that the current housing stock meets the needs of today's and tomorrow's consumers.

Objective 2. The Town will ensure that the new Zoning Ordinance encourages creative forms of new development and redevelopment of the existing housing stock.

Objective 3. New development regulations will be clear and easy-to-understand.

# Chapter 7: Community Facilities

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## 6.1 OVERVIEW

Community facilities bridge the central needs of residents and business with key services. This chapter will review the current infrastructure and community programs that are essential to the health and growth of the Town of Varnville and assess future needs and make policy recommendations for meeting them. The Town has committed to provide sufficient infrastructure to meet the needs of the residents, while encouraging economic growth.

The overriding objective for the Town as it plans for future growth is to create new development and redevelopment that pays for itself. The Town should require development impact analyses for major development and it should establish related compensation policies and procedures. As part of the new Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Varnville, the following areas will be evaluated for ability to serve present and future populations:



- Water and sewer supply and treatment
- Solid waste collection and disposal
- Police, fire, and emergency medical services
- Educational facilities
- Public Space and Recreational Facilities

## 7.2 PUBLIC SERVICES

### Water System

Residents depend on safe and readily available water at all times to carry out everyday activities and future development requires a safe and secure supply for new residents and businesses. Varnville draws from the Floridian Aquifer, a high quality source, with three wells to supply the Town's drinking water system. The Floridian Aquifer, one of the world's most productive, reaches deep through the southeast in the states of Florida, Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina. In Varnville, the average water production is 0.315 million gallons per day (MGD) with a daily maximum of 0.358 MGD. The current capacity is rated at 0.816 MGD, leaving a potential surplus of .458 MGD or 458,000 gallons per day (GPD).

Using the national average consumption (per EPA) of approximately 70 gallons per person per day, the existing Town system could theoretically provide water for an additional 6,500 residents. However, commercial and, especially, industrial development will place higher water demands on the system—up to 300 GPD for small commercial operations and 500 GPD for small industrial operations; 2,200 GPD for medium-sized commercial development and 3,400 GPD for medium-sized industries. Since future development should include a variety of uses, it will be necessary to both monitor the remaining capacity of the current system and plan for future uses and users.



Also, according to a study recently completed by BP Barber, the system has had maintenance problems with hydrants, backflow prevention, tank rusting, chlorine supplies, and electrical equipment.

### **Waste Water/Septic**

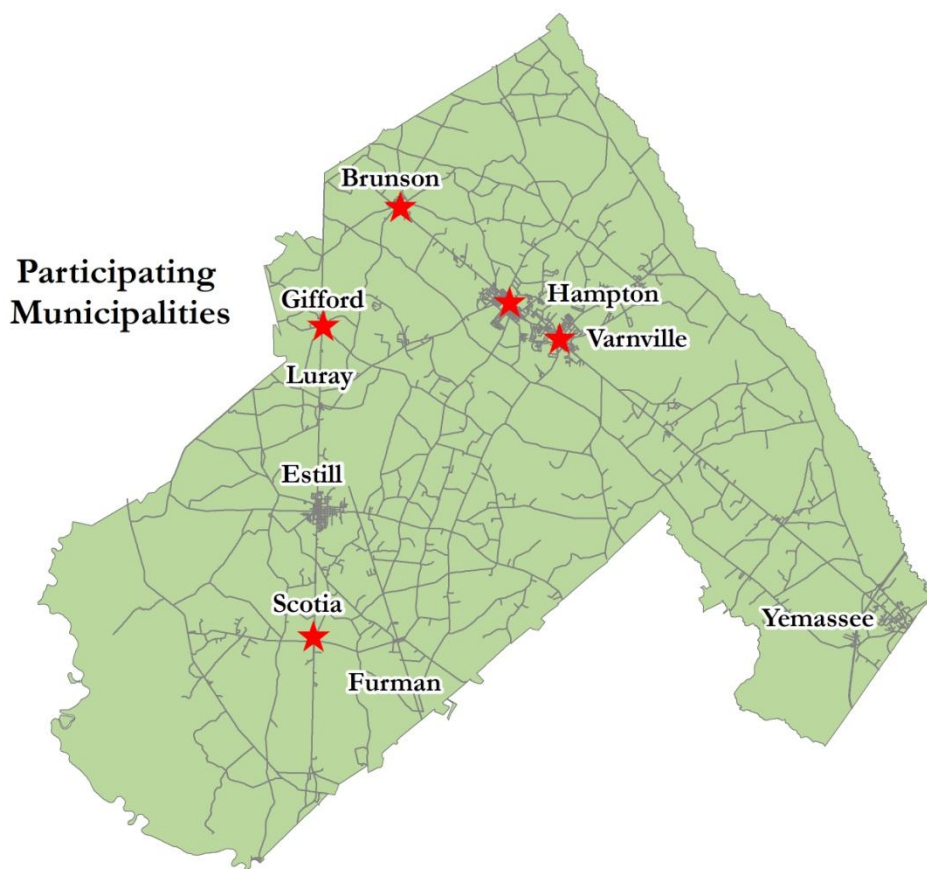
Waste water treatment and distribution systems are also essential for future growth and development. The sanitary sewer system's lines are maintained by the Town of Varnville, though the effluent is treated by the Town of Hampton, which has been permitted to discharge 2 MGD, and now has a remaining capacity of 265,824 GPD.. Varnville contracts with Hampton for 460,000GPD. At an average of 90 GPD per person, an additional 2,900 residents could be provided with waste water services. As with water, commercial and industrial users generate more wastewater than do homes.

According to the BP Barber study, Varnville has experienced problems with inflow and infiltration (I&I). I&I causes the amount of effluent to surge during major rain events and can increase the probability of ground and surface water contamination.

Approximately 35 households are not serviced by the sanitary sewer system and use on-site treatment such as a septic system. The town should remind residents of proper maintenance and use to ensure the on-site systems remain viable in the future and limit pollution to the ground and surface water systems. Areas without access to wastewater are shown in Map 7.3. The town should progressively add sewer service for those who use septic systems.

### **Lowcountry Regional Water Authority**

The proposed regional water authority is coalition of town-owned systems within Hampton County. Operating expenditures, environmental permitting fees, labor, and capital equipment purchases and maintenance all are costly for individual municipalities. As a result, the aim of the authority is to reduce the operational costs of each system by pooling resources and consolidating services. The Town of Varnville “earnestly desires the implementation of the Lowcountry Regional Water Authority” and believes it will be a positive move for economic development in the years to come.



**Map 7.1: Lowcountry Regional Water Authority**



# Town of Varnville Water Lines & Hydrants



Map 7.2: Water Lines & Hydrants



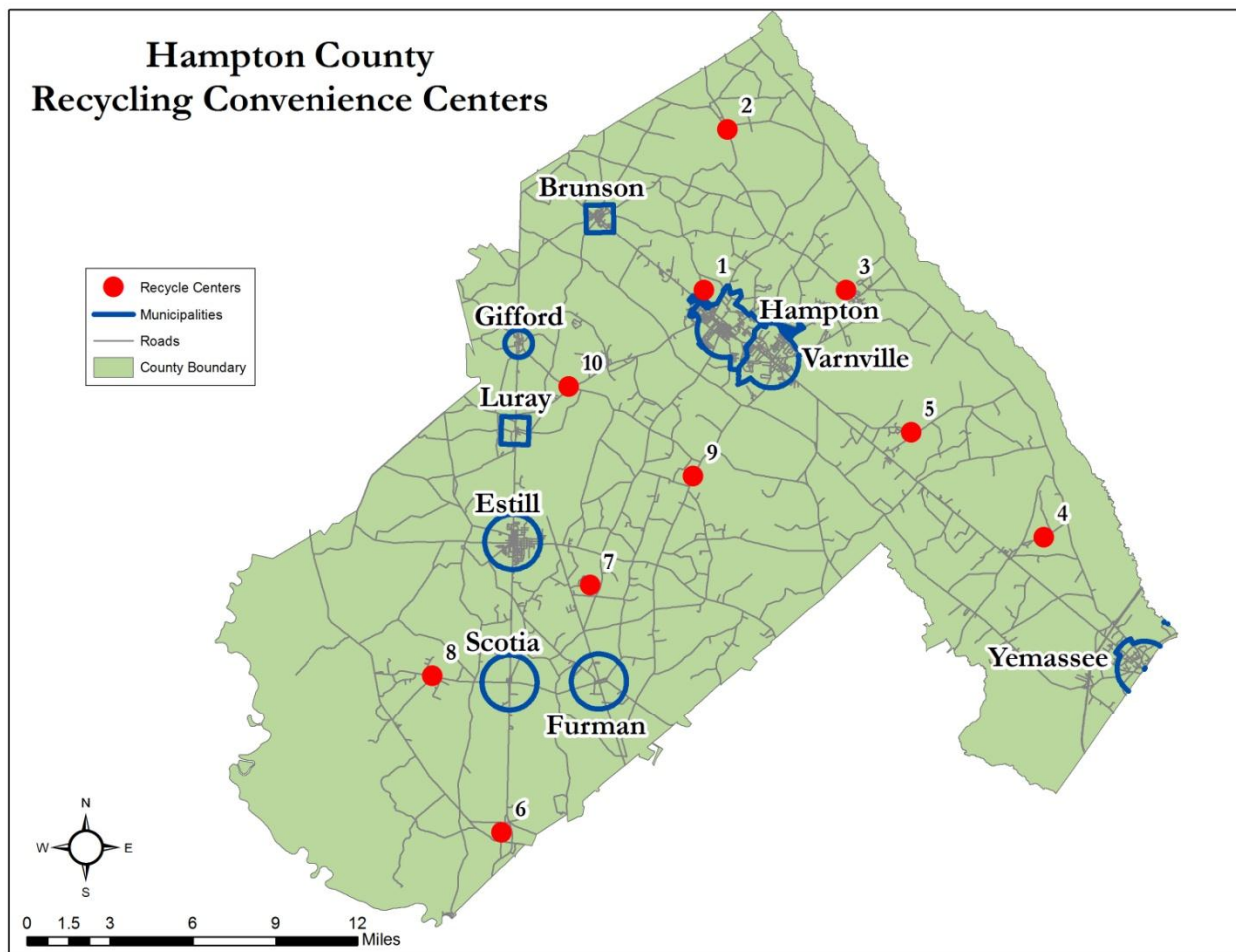


Map 7.3: Sewer Availability

## Solid Waste

Solid waste is collected curbside three days a week by the Public Works Department. The Town does not provide for curbside recycling, but residents may use the county convenience centers shown on the Figure to the right. The Town should promote the usage of the county-run convenience centers to reduce the total tonnage delivered to the landfill. Recycling is not only a benefit to the environment it can also save money by decreasing the amount of solid waste that is dumped in the landfill, which will increase the amount of time before it reaches its capacity, thereby delaying major expenditures in which the Town would participate as part of the County. The Town should coordinate with the County to provide a convenience center within the town limits.

A comprehensive list of locations, hours of operation and accepted recyclables is available at Hampton County's Website



Map 7.4 Hampton County Recycling Convenience Centers

## 7.3 PUBLIC SAFETY

### Police Protection



The Town of Varnville is currently served by six police officers, including the chief. The police department is located within Town Hall and operates under a \$400,000 budget. Officers respond to approximately thirty calls a month -- primarily domestic violence, assault and petty larceny calls. The department has recently leased two new patrol vehicles from the State; and will need an additional two new vehicles to replace aging cars. The department is interested in surveillance and personal equipment upgrades.

### Fire Protection

Fourteen volunteer firefighters serve the Town of Varnville. The department utilizes two town-owned and one county-owned fire engine with one equipment truck. The ISO rating is considered class five. ISO classes refer to the communities' ability to suppress fires. A rating in class of one means a superior level of protection, while a rating of 10 indicates that the community does not meet ISO's minimum criteria. Many factors go into the rating. Some include, but are not limited to: water infrastructure and hydrant systems to fire protection personnel and equipment. Forty-five percent of the rating is based upon the water systems. The report influences the cost of insurance for residents and business. Varnville can build upon the current assets to improve the level of service to the community both for the safety of all the residents and economic development, since residential, commercial and industrial insurance costs become lower as the rating improves.

Fire hydrant locations are highlighted on Map 7.2 .

### Emergency Medical Services

Hampton County provides twenty-four hour emergency medical and dispatch services to Varnville residents.

## **7.4 HEALTH CARE**

Access to health care, especially in rural areas and small communities, is fundamental to the strength of the community and its ability to attract new development. As a result, Varnville is fortunate to have the new Hampton Regional Medical Center within its boundaries. It serves approximately 30,000 patients a year with thirty-two acute care beds and six intensive care beds. The hospital also provides emergency, diagnostic and surgical services, with twenty-two affiliated physicians and 225 full and part-time employees.

Trauma centers are primarily used in Charleston and Columbia, but also Savannah.

## **7.5 EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES**

### **Primary and Secondary Education**

Educational facilities and student performance are also a key component of a community's ability to attract both new residents and new businesses. Schools in Varnville are supplied and administered by Hampton County District One, which means that the Town does not have a direct role in their management.

Hampton County District One operates seven schools in the northern areas of the Hampton County; three of which are in Varnville. The district educates approximately 345 students at Varnville Elementary, 388 students at North District Middle School, and 727 students at Wade Hampton High. The School District is one of Varnville's largest employers with 178 employees. According to the U.S. Department of Education, in the 2007-2008 school year, Hampton County District One operated under a \$27,685,000 budget or \$9,810 per student—lower than the national per capita spending of \$10,297. Future plans include new construction and reuse of existing buildings in the North District Middle School.

Given the importance of education to both the present and future of Varnville, the Town (possibly through the Planning Commission) should consider a facilities improvement and planning relationship with the School District.

### **Higher Education**

The Technical College of the Lowcountry (TCL) has a facility in Varnville that offers classes for students to work toward Associate of Arts, Administrative Arts, Computer Science, and Industrial Technology Degrees. The College also offers continuing education in the health field to help students to prepare for national certifications. In 2011 the Hampton Campus of TCL underwent \$1.2 million in major renovations. TCL stated:

The renovation will not only feature a new façade, but will showcase new windows, HVAC system, electrical system, bathrooms, and flooring. The building interior is being reconfigured to accommodate new programs in areas such as welding and Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machine tool technology. In addition, the project will include upgraded equipment and increased capacity for existing programs in computer science, certified nursing assistant, and building construction technology.

## **7.6 RECREATIONAL FACILITIES**

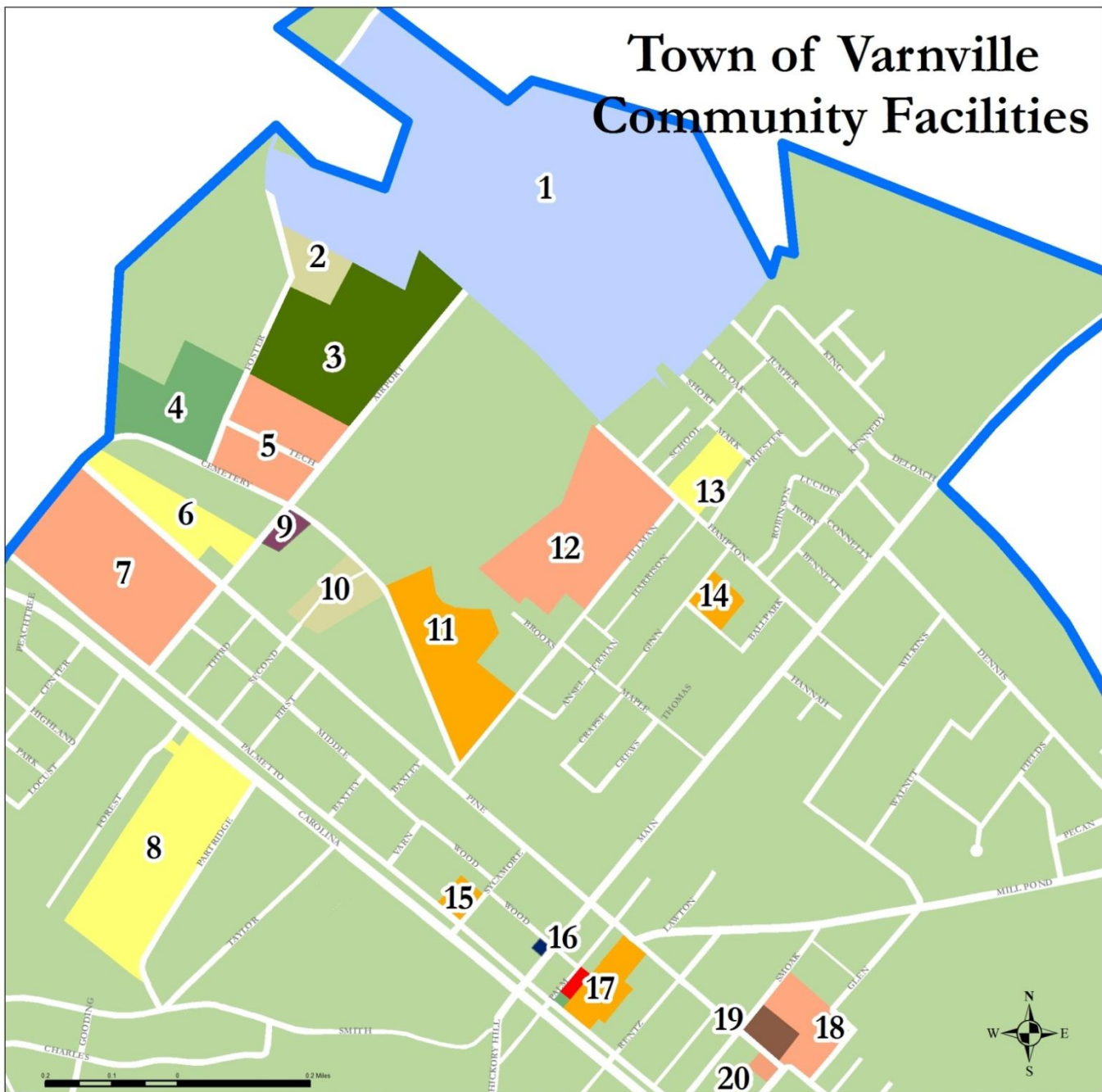
There are three town-owned parks: Freeman Park (94.57 ac.), Town Park (1.47 ac.), and Ginn Park (2.58 ac.). The three town parks offer ball fields and playground equipment to area residents. A county-owned facility is housed in an old gymnasium where karate, basketball, gymnastics, dance, aerobics and senior programs are offered. In addition to the gym, the site contains a small park which includes a playground, benches and a natural trail. The recreation department employs two fulltime staff—a director and a program coordinator. While the current facility has had the roof replaced and a fresh coat of paint, it is in need of replacement. Staff has determined that a new updated multi-use facility is needed to meet the growing demand for current programs.

Varnville should progressively expand recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Coordination between the town and county governments will be essential to providing the most efficient recreational services. This may include incorporating the rich natural and cultural resources within a town-wide or even county-wide multiuse greenway development -- which would not only help to attract and retain residents, but improve the well-being of the Town's people. Public space allows residents to move outside the conventional work and home space to spaces that stimulate active and passive experiences. Areas with plentiful tree cover, benches, and fountains along with trails, ball fields, playgrounds and gyms all add interest to the physical structure of the Town and help build a strong sense of place.

Varnville's existing community facilities are listed on the following map:



# Town of Varnville Community Facilities



- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1-Airport                              | 11-Freeman Park                                 |
| 2-Ellis Cemetery                       | 12-North District Middle School                 |
| 3-National Guard Facilities            | 13-Board of Disabilities & Special Needs        |
| 4- Hampton County Sheriff's Department | 14-Ginn Park                                    |
| 5-Harrison Peoples Center              | 15-Town Park                                    |
| 6-Technical College of the Lowcountry  | 16-Post Office                                  |
| 7-Wade Hampton High School             | 17-Town Hall, Fire Department, HCSO Sub-Station |
| 8-Hampton Regional Medical Center      | 18-Varnville Elementary School                  |
| 9-Jahab Shrine Club                    | 19-Hampton County Recreation Department         |
| 10-Varnville Cemetery                  | 20-Hampton District One Offices                 |

The Lowcountry Council of Governments has made all reasonable efforts to ensure the accuracy of this map. LCOG expressly disclaims all responsibility for any errors, omissions, and/or for any damages which may result in the use of this map.  
Date: September 27, 2011  
Data Source: Hampton County, LCOG  
N.C. and/or GIS Maps: ncmsh@lowcountry.com

Map 7.5: Community Facilities



## **7.7 COMMUNITY FACILITIES GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Goal 1: Provide efficient and adequate public services to meet the needs of the present and future population of the Town of Varnville and those who visit.**

**Goal 2: Engage in projects to expand and advance the public services and/or facilities to enhance the quality of life for the residents and visitors of the Town of Varnville.**

**Goal 3: Focus on planning for future growth in a way that development and redevelopment pay for themselves in terms of the provision of new and additional community facilities and services.**

### **OBJECTIVE 1: Sewer/Septic, Solid Waste and Water**

1. Prioritize sewer line repairs in the budget.
2. Continue the support for the Lowcountry Regional Water Authority.
3. Encourage new development, through incentives or requirements, to use the existing sewer system instead of septic tanks as capacity allows.
4. Encourage water conservation.

### **OBJECTIVE 2: Recreational Facilities**

1. Improve existing recreational facilities.
2. Identify potential areas for new recreational sites that reach all citizens of Varnville.
3. Connect recreational facilities with surrounding facilities and downtown with a trail through the use of pedestrian and bicycle pathways.
5. Maintain current conservation standards and encourage the maintenance and creation of more public green space.

### **OBJECTIVE 3: Capital Improvements**

1. Use the inventory of public facilities and the capacity maps with the location of sewer and water facilities in this section and the map of the areas the Town is willing to serve in the future in the Land Use section as a guide for future planning.
  - a. The town will incorporate more fire hydrants throughout the community.
  - b. The Town will incrementally connect sewer services, where feasible, for those using septic.

# Chapter 8: Transportation

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## 8.1 PREAMBLE

To a large extent, roads, sidewalks, and multiuse pathways define a community – they are the backbones that combine with buildings and trees to create a sense of place. Residents rely on these networks to get from one place to the other, and they affect the community’s economy, appearance and safety. The many players who have a role in Varnville’s transportation planning include the Town, Hampton County, the Lowcountry Council of Governments (LCOG), South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) and the US Department of Transportation’s Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA), along with property owners and residents. SCDOT provides most of the physical needs for roads in Varnville, but that does not diminish the role Varnville will need to play in working with all of the agencies now and in the future to ensure that the Town’s changing transportation needs are met

### Roads and Highways – Regional Context

Varnville is well serviced by regional highways, especially U.S. 278, which provides a major transportation link to and from other parts of the state, the Lowcountry and Georgia. SCDOT data shows that there is sufficient capacity, through the Town of Varnville, on U.S. 278 to support passenger and freight travel for the foreseeable future. The Vehicle Capacity (V/C) Ratio for U.S. 278 through Varnville is 0.49, which means that, on average, the highway is currently used at just less than half its capacity. {**Note:** a V/C ratio that exceeds one is an indicator of congestion}. SCDOT also monitors intersections for accidents, both with and without injuries and deaths to determine dangerous areas that are in need of improvements. Presently, the data shows that no Varnville intersections are rated as safety problems.

Future Town transportation policies should implement the recommendations of the Lowcountry Long Range Transportation Plan, which will be completely updated and revised by LCOG during the next six months. Although new policies and approaches will be added, it will maintain its emphasis on providing alternatives to automobiles and light trucks as virtually the only forms of passenger transportation in the Region. It will also take a more complete look at freight transportation, both as an economic development opportunity and as a potential source of traffic conflict and congestion. Varnville may be impacted by freight transportation movements, both truck and rail, in the future than currently because of its proximity to I-95, combined with the increasing use of U.S. 278 as a connector/short-cut and the widening of SC 68 to the new industrial park. The expansion of the ports of Charleston and Savannah, and possibly even a potential Jasper Port will also provide opportunities for the new logistics and distribution centers, and related industrial uses in the new industrial park, which is not far from the eastern end of Varnville.. Despite the downturn in the economy in recent years, the ports have provided economic strength for the entire region; economic recovery will magnify their

contribution. In light of these Regional developments, the Town should prepare to take advantage of the closely linked freight transportation and economic development and plan to prevent potential transportation-related problems.

Town officials, along with LCOG and SCDOT, should monitor developments and plan ahead so that highways, especially US 278, through the Town will be adequate for increased freight traffic. And to ensure that such increased traffic is accommodated safely and with minimal disturbances to existing land uses, community facilities and historic resources.

## **8.2 ALTERNATIVE MODES OF TRANSPORTATION**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and now the 21<sup>st</sup>, communities have become increasingly dependent on the automobile to get to work, shop, medical facilities and even places of worship. As a compact community that already embodies many of the characteristics that planners call “walkability,” Varnville can positively influence residents’ dependence on the automobile. There would be several benefits: A less congested road system; A reduction of ground level ozone and reduction of dependence on fossil fuels; More livable and walkable communities, and healthier residents and increased attractiveness to visitors and prospective residents.

Since some Varnville residents have limited or no access to a vehicle, providing alternatives will improve the quality of life and access to opportunities for them.

### **Pedestrian/Bicycle**

Varnville’s important community facilities are in close proximity to each other. This provides a great opportunity to the town for significant linkages—especially among the schools. Varnville’s scale and form together should encourage walking and bicycle riding as a means of transportation, as well as for recreation and exercise. Large numbers of residents of all ages and socio-economic groups should be able to safely and efficiently navigate around the community by either foot or bicycle.

Varnville should prioritize streets areas that can accommodate bicycles and paths for consideration of facilities. Varnville will coordinate with County and Regional plans to offer bicycle facilities that connect to other area municipalities and places of employment. The town will cooperate with area partners, for grants and other funding opportunities to make these modes of transportation readily available for present and future residents.

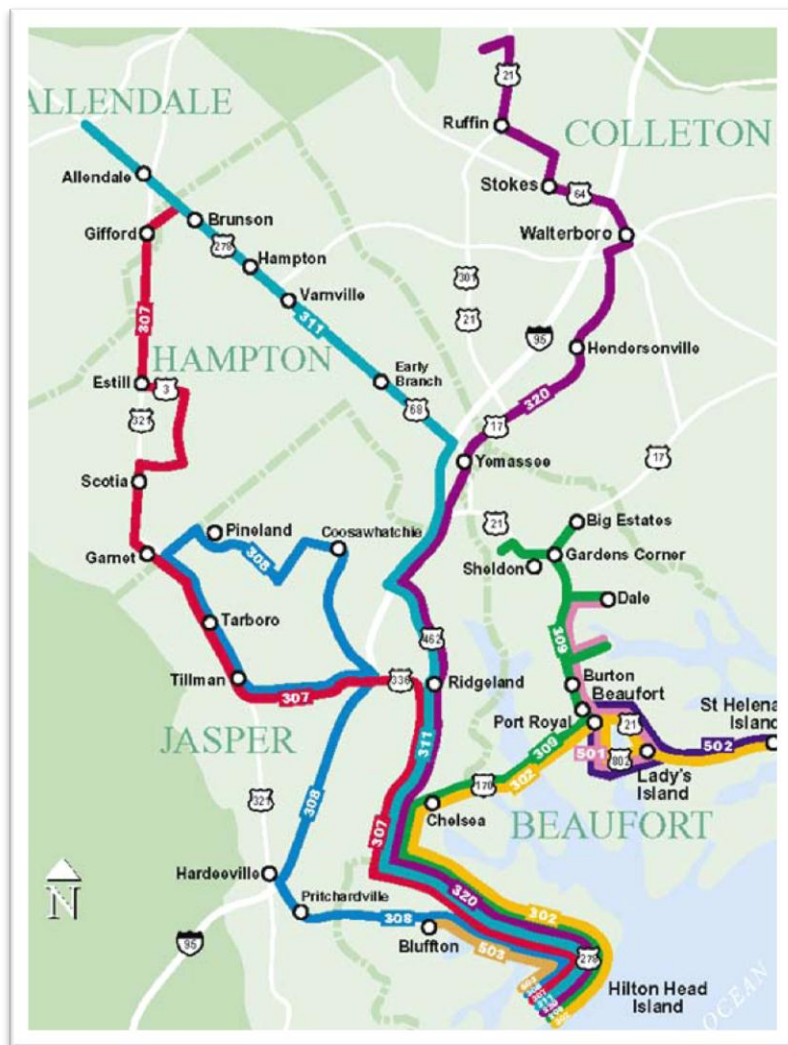
LCOG will begin work on a Regional bike and pedestrian transportation plan in early 2012. The Town will have the opportunity to ensure that their needs are included.

## Public Transit

Palmetto Breeze, the operating name for the Lowcountry Regional Transit Agency (LRTA), services Varnville residents with a commuter route that takes passengers to the Hilton Head Area for work and then brings them home in the evening. Hampton County has the second highest ridership of the six counties serviced with over 31,000 passengers in the 2009-2010 fiscal year.

Palmetto Breeze and LCOG are in the process of planning a number of major system expansions that will eventually result in the provision of different types of public transit to serve a much wider range of potential passengers. The long-

term goal is to provide both “need” (usually defined as persons with low incomes and/or special needs) and “choice” (all other segments of the population) riders with opportunities to use public transit for trips to and from work, shopping, education, medical appointments and entertainment. LCOG will update the Town of Varnville as the implementation of the plans moves toward implementation so that the Town and its residents will be able to support and then to take advantage of the proposed improvements.



Map 8.1: Palmetto Breeze Transit Routes

## **8.3 TRANSPORTATION AND TOURISM**

Varnville needs to take advantage of traffic moving through the region via U.S. 278 by enhancement projects throughout the corridor and beyond. A focus on improving this corridor will also be a source of community pride for current and future residents.

Among the improvements that should be included are “way-finding” signage to encourage drivers from Augusta, Atlanta, Hilton Head and other areas to make unplanned trips off the highway and into and through historic Varnville. Markers will add interest to sites that may have gone unnoticed. This will include directions to “Forrest Gump” movie sites in Varnville; even some of the world’s largest and most sophisticated tourist cities, such as Paris and New York, make sure that visitors know how to find the scenes of their favorite movies. Closer to home, the Beaufort Visitors Center regularly fields more questions about “Mrs. Gump’s boarding house,” than they do about the Union occupation of the town in 1861.

Varnville should take advantage of its historical walking tour by improving and expanding the existing trail. It should become a priority to touch-up and add historical markers along with improving the pedestrian facilities within the trail system.

At the same time, because some parking methods are more effective for getting people to stop than others. Varnville should work with state officials and other experts to study the impact of changing parallel parking to angle parking in the Downtown area.

## **8.4 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

New development will connect to the existing built-up area by means of extending the traditional grid pattern. New street patterns should be modeled on the existing street pattern, while avoiding the use of cul-de-sacs.

Pedestrian and bike facilities are encouraged in all new development to promote street connectivity and to create an integrated community. The new Zoning Ordinance should include incentives in the form of density bonuses for developers who incorporate pedestrian facilities. This approach does not mean to suggest that every street be built with a bicycle lane, but that pedestrian/bicycle facilities combine to create a network of options for all residents. All new facilities will be ADA compliant and include curb ramps. The cost of such projects will not be seen as special, but necessary for future economic and human health. These policies should be carried through in planning for new construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, repair, and maintenance.

## 8.5 CORRIDOR REDEVELOPMENT

Varnville has taken great strides to improve the appearance of the corridors with palm tree plantings, potted plants, litter clean-up activities and attractive signage, but the Town must continuously implement new projects that enhance both safety and beauty. The town should apply for FHWA enhancement grants to further improve the appearance of streets and key intersections.

The entrances to Varnville provide the first impression of the Town to people driving through. As such, their improvement should be seen as an economic development priority in order to attract travelers to spend time and money in Varnville. Gateway projects could include signage, lighting, landscaping and improved pedestrian facilities where appropriate. Clear and concise signage should direct people to the points of interest in Varnville, such as the historic churches and homes. Landscaping should include low-maintenance and drought-tolerant plantings, for low-cost maintenance. Lighting should be context-sensitive and serve both form and function. Design principles should coordinate concepts between gateway points, but maintain distinct differences at each entrance. These differences may highlight the heritage and history of the community and could focus on a design that incorporate elements of the railroad, sawmill, or the Victorian era.

There are four priority locations:

- **U.S. 278 East Gateway** – This area already has the Varnville welcome sign, but the town will benefit from improved landscaping, new signage, and lighting. A downtown Varnville way-finding sign will let people know they are approaching Historic Downtown Varnville and inform visitors where they can find more information.
- **U.S. 278 West Gateway** – This area ties the Town of Hampton and Varnville together, but it's important to highlight the transition as travelers enter one community and leave the other. The priority in this area will be updated and improved signage and landscaping. This space provides an opportunity for the two communities to work together.
- **Main Street Gateway** – The intersection of U.S. 278 and Main Street is central to the future success of Downtown Varnville and will be the most costly. Enhancements here will include simple yet attractive signs that will entice visitors to shop and stop to see historical sites. Crosswalks, possibly constructed of pavers, with clear markings will improve safety conditions. Added street and pedestrian lighting, setting with the historic buildings, will improve town character and safety. Plantings, including a tree belt (studies have shown tree canopies can improve economic indicators), where appropriate, will provide relief from the heat and add texture to the intersection and adjacent areas.

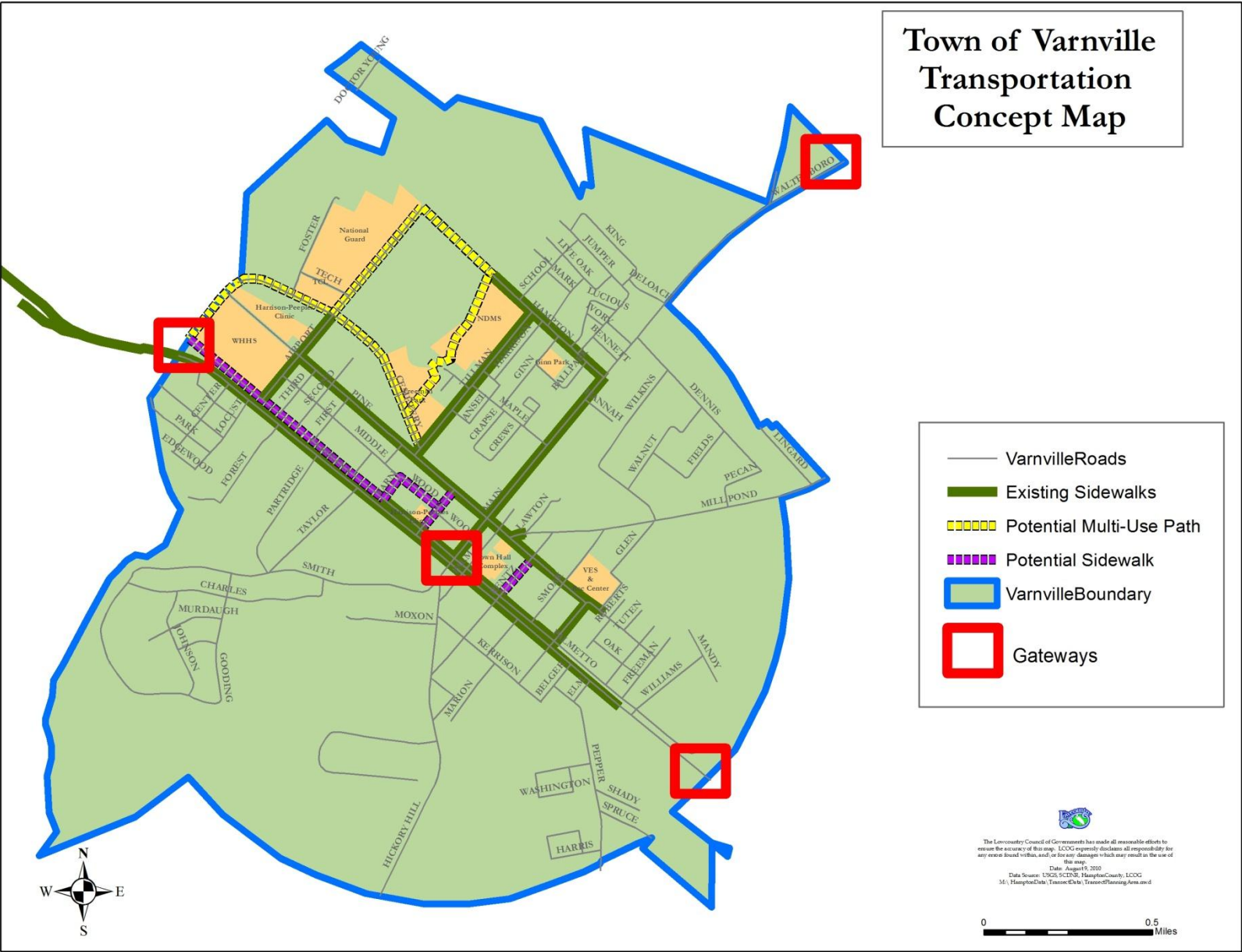


Opportunities to widen the tree belt and narrow the streets should be considered when streets are constructed to improve stormwater management. Street furniture will add function to the area as well improve the aesthetics.

- **Highway 63 Northern Gateway** - This entrance is less traveled and as such should be subtler in design. A simple sign that directs traffic to areas of interest is appropriate at this location.

### **Pedestrian and Corridor Concept Map**

The map on the following page illustrates the proposed gateways as well as the potential multiuse path and sidewalk facilities. The improvements focus on the historic walking tour area and the schools. It is a conceptual starting point, and can service as the basis for discussion within the community and for eventual design work.



Map 8.1: Pedestrian and Gateway Concept Map

## **8.6 TRANSPORTATION GOALS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **GOAL 1: PROVIDE A RANGE OF CHOICES THAT ARE RELIABLE, SAFE, AND EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION FOR ALL RESIDENTS.**

- Work toward making crosswalks, sidewalks and multiuse paths safe for all people with a focus on seniors and the disabled.
- Work with LCOG and LRTA to plan and provide feasible and cost-effective public transit options for Varnville.
- Provide a shelter that can be used by both people waiting for the bus and for people who are walking.

### **GOAL 2: COORDINATE AND SUPPORT PROJECTS THAT PROMOTE TRANSPORTATION SERVICES WHICH ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL PRESENT AND FUTURE RESIDENTS OF THE TOWN OF VARNVILLE.**

- Work with SCDOT, LCOG, Hampton County and other organizations to develop alternative services and facilities. Build relationships between town, school officials, and residents to increase the safety and attractiveness of bicycling by providing educational programs, tools, and resources.

### **GOAL 3: SUPPORT AND COORDINATE PROJECTS THAT PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS.**

- Work with the Hampton County Economic Development Commission, area Chambers of Commerce and County and Regional tourism organizations so that mutually-supportive goals are met and projects are implemented.

### **GOAL 4: PROMOTE TOURISM THROUGH TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENT PROJECTS.**

- Apply for enhancement grants to improve appearance of streets and downtown intersections.

### **GOAL 5: ENCOURAGE NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT TO PROVIDE CONNECTIVITY FOR BOTH MOTORIZED VEHICLES AND FOR PEDESTRIANS AND BICYCLISTS BETWEEN NEW AND EXISTING AREAS.**

# Chapter 9: Priority Investment

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## 9.1 INTRODUCTION

In 2007 Governor Mark Sanford signed The Priority Investment Act. The law has a number of implications for the Comprehensive Plan which include: adding the Priority Investment and Transportation Elements to the Comprehensive Plan, as well as mandating that the Housing Element address affordable housing in terms of market-based incentives. The act also addresses affordable housing and traditional neighborhood design incentives within the zoning ordinance.

The Priority Investment Element will outline the possible funding sources for the capital expenditures proposed in the comprehensive plan. It will also highlight the multijurisdictional approach that may be embraced through the programs. This document has encouraged continued planning relationships with both public and private organizations that have influence on development within the Town of Varnville. This chapter will propose areas in which those relationships can be developed to acquire funding for the capital projects proposed in the plan.

## 9.2 CAPITAL INVESTMENT PLANNING AND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of the elements within Town of Varnville Comprehensive Plan contain specific recommendations that can only be implemented through capital expenditures. Therefore, to implement this plan, future capital budgets should incorporate those items as priority investments. As a result a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) should be prepared that incorporates Comprehensive Plan policies and priorities. This goes beyond the annual capital budgeting process to include longer-term projects. This CIP should be evaluated yearly to monitor the implementation of projects proposed in the Comprehensive Plan

Projects proposed in this plan are not necessarily intended to be completed all at once, but rather in phases. The town should develop a decision-making methodology, or a matrix, not only for the projects proposed in this plan, but also for items that will come up after this plan is published and before the next one is completed. Developing a methodology ensures that the most feasible and pressing projects are addressed first to achieve the best use of public funds and potential overall return on investments, while at the same time ensuring the highest quality of services for residents.

- Priority 1: New public facilities and improvements to existing facilities that eliminate public hazards.
- Priority 2: Repair, Renovation, and replacement of worn out facilities
- Priority 3: New expanded facilities that reduce or eliminate existing deficiencies in levels of service
- Priority 4: New and expanded facilities necessary to serve new projected development and redevelopment as envisioned and recommended in this Comprehensive Plan.

### 9.3 DEVELOPMENT OF A FUNDING STRATEGY

Town Council and staff spend many hours developing budgets and pursuing a path that balances economic development with taxes, fees and grants to meet the critical needs of the community without discouraging growth. This element will not generate a specific Capital Improvements Program. Instead, the Priority Investment Element will help provide guidance for the future growth and funding of projects throughout Varnville, and will include cooperative approaches for obtaining financing. The Town of Varnville, along with partners, will have to become very skillful at applying for a diverse set of federal and state grants as well as at fostering relationships with the private sector to raise funds for the projects outlined in this plan and beyond. Listed below are programs that Varnville may utilize to fund priority improvements.

#### Tax Increment Financing (TIF):

This popular method is used throughout the United States to finance redevelopment of distressed areas or aged infrastructure. TIF uses projected gains in property taxes to fund capital projects. Many communities have used this method to redevelop downtown areas with streetscape and safety improvements in “TIF districts.” Some communities tend to address both infrastructural issues and aesthetics during the same phase. For instance, streetscape improvements can be made following repair or replacement of water, sewer, and stormwater systems within the TIF district.

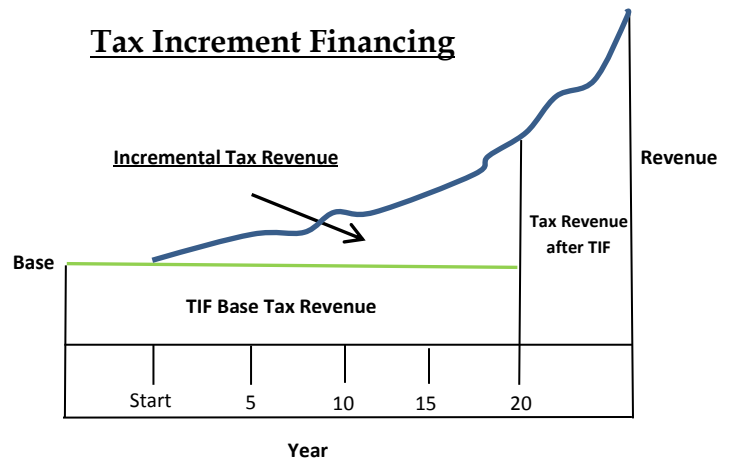


Figure 2: Tax Increment Financing

The City of Woodruff South Carolina uses TIF for a number of improvements, including a façade grant program for businesses in the district. The budget for the program is \$25,000. Businesses can apply for up to \$2,500 in matching funds to make improvements to the facades of their buildings. This is one method the Town of Varnville can use to develop public/private partnerships to enhance the attractiveness of the downtown area.

The City of Beaufort has developed an aggressive plan to redevelop Boundary Street, the major gateway corridor through the city. The plan aims to improve traffic flow, safety and the overall aesthetics within the corridor as well as establish civic buildings in the area. The City has financed portions of the plan that are considered major public realm improvements through the establishment of a TIF district.

**Impact Fees** are paid by developers to the Town in order to decrease the cost of providing infrastructure and community services to large-scale new developments. In this way the Town and current residents will not end up paying for benefits received only by new residents and businesses. South Carolina law enables communities to charge impact fees for public facilities, such as the provision for water and sewer services, flood control, stormwater management, public safety, transportation needs, parks, libraries, and recreational facilities. The fees must have a strong link between the services and the major new developments. Developers do not generally object to impact fees, as they are accustomed to the fees in many communities. The impact fees should be clear to the developers from the beginning of the proposed development.

In order to fully understand the infrastructure and service costs to the Town of a particular future development, an assessment will need to be made. In Beaufort County, for instance, road impact fees are evaluated by estimating the additional number of trips, turns at intersections and other traffic generated by the proposed new development. Other communities base their analyses on expected fiscal, social, environmental, and transportation impacts.

An assessment will also provide an opportunity for the Town of Varnville to evaluate future development in terms of the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.



**Hydrant Fees** – A charge on the monthly water bill to provide for the maintenance and upgrade of the hydrant system. As discussed in the Community Facilities Element (Chapter 7), increased fire protection can have an influence on economic development within the town as insurance rates become lower.

**Water and Sewer Revenue** – The Town and residents may consider financing connections to the wastewater system, for those who wish to have sewer services, through monthly payments on the customer’s water bill.

**USDA Rural Development** – This program offers rural communities (those with less than 20,000 people) technical and financial assistance through loans and grants with funding for community facilities, such as fire and police stations and equipment, hospitals, libraries, nursing homes, and schools. Loan and grant funds may be used to construct, enlarge, or improve community facilities. This can include costs to acquire land needed for a facility, pay necessary professional fees, and purchase equipment required for its operation. Grant assistance may be approved for up to 75 percent of the total project cost. The maximum award amount varies and is based on median household income, population, economic feasibility and availability of funds. Projects are selected based on whether they serve small communities (with a population of 5,000 or less); low-income communities (median household income below the poverty line or 60 percent of the state rural median household income), or provide healthcare, public safety or public and community services. More information and assistance is offered through the USDA Service Center in Walterboro.

**Public/Private Partnerships** – Common community and business goals can be achieved through strategic partnerships. This is not a new tactic, but is becoming increasingly important due to budget constraints. This method can be used in coordination with many of the funding options listed here. TIF districts are commonly used in conjunction with private partnerships. The Municipal Association of South Carolina (MASC) recognized the City of Bennettsville in 2006 for their Public/Private initiatives to rehabilitate their downtown, explaining what the Town accomplished:

Bennettsville took on the ambitious project of creating and implementing a downtown master plan. The plan focused on three projects: renovating a downtown building for the police department, creating downtown upper-story housing and creating a chamber of commerce to promote local businesses. The City of Bennettsville also helped create 22 low- to moderate-income apartments in Bennettsville’s Historic Downtown District. An innovative public-private partnership developed the Downtown Upper-Story Housing Project to provide residences on the second and third floors of commercial buildings that had previously been vacated. The project provided a jump-start for rehabilitating other downtown properties.

**SCDOT Grants** – Transportation Enhancement grants are funded by Federal Highways (FHWA) and are administered by SCDOT. These grants are community-based and focus on pedestrian and bicycle facilities, landscaping, and historical preservation. Improvements suggested in the transportation component of this Plan may be eligible.

The selection criteria are based on the anticipated benefits for the community, number of users, environmental impact, alignment with the comprehensive plan goals, level of public support, number of sponsors, maintenance commitment, project innovation, linkage to other projects and the transportation system, and matching funds (which is 20 percent and may be in the form of cash or in-kind goods and services donations).

**Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)** – The federal government appropriates funds to the states to administer these grants to communities for varied projects that may include planning, infrastructure, and affordable housing, etc. A community is granted funds based on the extent of poverty in the area. Each year the state will determine the appropriate use for the funds. Varnville has historically used this type of grant, assisted by the Community and Economic Development department of LCOG, to address infrastructural issues as discussed in the Housing Element (Chapter 6).

**South Carolina Park and Recreation Development Fund (PARD)** – A state-funded non-competitive grant program for eligible local governments which helps finance the planning and development of recreational facilities. The typical local match is 20 percent.

## **9.4 COORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND JURISDICTIONS**

The Priority Investment Act states: “The recommendation of those projects for public expenditure must be done through coordination with adjacent and relevant jurisdictions and agencies.” For instance, the plan proposes the pedestrian and sidewalk expansion and improvements around the schools. This may include planning and coordination with the school district. The process will be both formal and informal and will include the facilitation of on-going dialogue with the various agencies and organizations in order to maintain and improve the quality of life and nurture innovation in Varnville. The Town, in accordance with the law, will provide written notification to all agencies for projects affecting their jurisdictional areas. Utility providers and the railroad should also be considered for coordination as many activities will involve their interests. Planning coordination may include the following organizations:

- Hampton County
- Town of Hampton
- LCOG
- SCDOT
- North District
- Hampton Regional Medical Center
- Utilities
- CSX

The following table includes the capital projects proposed in the Comprehensive Plan, possible funding sources, coordinating organizations, and a tentative implementation timeline. The table is meant only to offer guidance to decision-makers and the public.

<b>Comprehensive Plan Capital Proposals, Coordination, and Funding</b>				
<b>Comprehensive Plan Capital Proposal</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Possible Funding Sources</b>	<b>Coordination</b>	<b>Implementation</b>
<b>Community Facilities</b>				
Sewer Service to Existing Neighborhoods	Connect residents using septic systems to waste treatment systems.	CDBG, Water and Sewer Revenue	LCOG	Ongoing
Police Cars	Replace two aging vehicles.	USDA	LCOG	2014
Police Equipment	Enhance police officer protection and surveillance activities.	USDA	LCOG	2017
Fire Hydrants	Installation of new hydrants for better service.	Hydrant Fees, Impact Fees	--	Ongoing
Recreational Facilities	Improve and expand existing parks.	S.C. Park and Recreation Development Fund, Impact Fees	Hampton County, State of S.C., School District	Ongoing
<b>Cultural Resources</b>				
Historic Walking Tour	Improve and expand the walking tour.	S.C. Park and Recreation Development Fund, Private Investment	State of S.C., School District, Private Sector	2017
<b>Housing</b>				
Housing Survey	Develop a housing survey that identifies specific areas that need improvement and make recommendations.	CDBG	LCOG	2013
<b>Transportation</b>				
Corridor Beautification and Safety improvements	Add way-finding and plantings to attract visitors and create a source of pride for residents.	Transportation Enhancement Grants	SCDOT, LCOG, Town of Hampton, Hampton County	2015
Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities	Build multiuse paths to better connect community facilities.	Transportation Enhancement Grants, Impact Fees, Private Investment	SCDOT, LCOG, School District, , Hampton County	2017
Bus and Pedestrian Shelter	Provide seating and a shelter for people waiting for LRTA buses and for pedestrians.	Same as above	Federal Transit Administration (FTA), SCDOT, LCOG	2013

